

BENJI SWINBURNSON

Devotional Meditations on 2
Samuel

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Chapter 1

#1 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 1:1-27

“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles.” (Prov. 24:17)

Sports fans are familiar with the dilemma they face when it comes time for the league championship game. Most of these leagues have nearly 30 teams. The harsh reality of professional sports is that the odds of winning each year are very, very small. Passions for the home team run very high and often spill headlong into idolatry. People lament the loss of a big game the way we mourn the death of a close loved one. They rejoice as if we had entered heaven itself when their team wins.

But what do you do if the big game finally comes and your team doesn't make it? Some chose not to watch, still stung by the pain of the failure of their favorite franchise. Others decide to watch but struggle to figure out who to root for. Studies have shown that most sports fans who have no direct vested interest

in the winner usually decide to root against the team that they dislike the most.

Why is this? We tend to delight and rejoice in the fall of our enemies. When sin has its full grip on us, we can sometimes be so motivated by vengeance that we will be willing to go down ourselves provided we can bring our enemy down with us. Hatred, anger, jealousy, and vengeance are powerful emotions.

When we speak of these things in sports we can do so somewhat “tongue in cheek.” But they do reflect a deeper reality in human nature that often manifests itself in sinful motives, words, and actions. We desire the downfall of our enemies. We rejoice and celebrate when they suffer defeat.

David has suffered much from Saul. The evil done to him was great, and the good that he did in return was even greater. “Losing” is not fun even if it occurs in a fair fight. Unjustly suffering at the hands of others while patiently loving them is excruciatingly painful. To witness their downfall and rejoice at their demise would be a strong temptation.

But this is not what David does with Saul. Personally, Saul was his enemy. But publicly and theocratically Saul held the office of “King of Israel.” However, Saul had personally compromised his moral fitness for that office, as long as he remained in it honor was owed to him. In the king, the nation itself was summed up and represented (at least in the theocratic-civil aspect of their identity). From the divine side, God’s glory and “reputation” in the eyes of men is reflected in the human king of Israel. When he falls, the glory of Israel is put to shame. At

his defeat, the name of God is brought into disrepute. When the Philistines captured the Ark of God they believed that the power of their god Dagon had overcome the power of YHWH. This was, of course, not true. Instead, God's purpose was not to demonstrate his weakness before the gods of the nations but to provide a clear sign that judgment had come upon his people through unbelief. The public shame that his name endured was only temporary. The image of Dagon would be broken and brought low. In grace, the Ark would return to Israel.

Something similar occurs in the downfall of Saul. He holds the office of king. When he falls the nation falls. In his death, the glory of Israel is slain—the mighty have fallen (2 Sam. 1:19).

Although Saul was a wicked man who did great evil there is a reality deeper and more important than his person, namely, his office as king. While David may be tempted to rejoice in the demise of his personal enemy, his heart is fixed and focused on something else. He is the man after God's own heart. He loves what God loves and brings his priorities in alignment with his. This correspondence between himself and God is not simply a matter of words, actions, or the "externals" of his life. It presses down into the recesses of his heart.

David is so consumed by his desire to glorify the name of the God of Israel that he does not rejoice in the slaying of Saul. Instead, he laments the loss of the glory of Israel. In many respects, Saul's downfall is a personal gain for him. Given what he has suffered, I think we can all understand why he might have feelings of gratification when God fulfilled his rejection of Saul. But this aspect of Saul's demise matters little to him.

More important is the fact that in his death the whole nation has been brought to shame and God's name has been brought into disrepute.

Two scenes in this chapter clearly illustrate this point. The first is David's treatment of the Amalekite who brings him news of Saul and Jonathan's death. David carefully inquires as to the details of the matter, weighing an appropriate response. The Amalekite claims that he has killed Saul, bringing his crown and armlet as a trophy to David. The story of the Amalekite does not align with the details of 1 Samuel 31, which clearly states that Saul took his own life by falling on his own sword.

Why then does the Amalekite lie and claim to have done the deed himself? This Amalekite is a man of the flesh and a member of the kingdoms of this world. He assumes that David operates according to his principles. He thinks to himself: surely David will rejoice at the downfall of Saul. What better way for me to come into his good graces than to claim to be the one who took his life? What better gift could I offer than the crown and armlet of a king, especially because David will now assume the throne? The Amalekite believes that this act will result in his glory and exultation.

How wrong he was! Upon hearing the news, David immediately orders his execution. Although the Amalekite is actually innocent of killing Saul, he is guilty of lying and attempted theft in seeking glory and reward that is not properly due to him. David does not yet know the real facts of the case, but he has given the Amalekite due process as judge and king. The Amalekite is caught in his own lies and provides the basis for

his own demise.

David's heart is fixed upon God and his glory whether in heaven or in the eyes of men on earth. He remains innocent of procedural malfeasance in his execution even while God's just judgment comes upon the Amalekite through earthly means.

Secondly, we also see David's focus on God's glory in his lament over Saul and Jonathan. He cares little that his personal enemy has perished, especially given the fact that along with Saul he has lost a beloved friend in Jonathan. Whatever earthly "victory" he might claim is at best bittersweet. How often this is the case in military triumphs!? The joy of victory is lessened by the sting of the loss of fellow soldiers who did not survive for the parade of triumph.

David not only weeps over Saul and Jonathan but exhorts others to do the same. The mighty have fallen. Israel's glory lies in shame. The weapons of war have perished. Not only are the daughters of Israel called to mourn, but the mountains themselves are told to be free of rain or dew. Both Israel's people and place are to grieve the downfall of their king.

2 Samuel 1 is the capstone of David's persevering patience about Saul's pursuit of his life. Saul sought to give David evil, and David returned it with good. David's sincerity in this is fully vindicated in his execution of the Amalekite and his song of lamentation.

In these things, David reflected God himself as well as his son and Lord—Jesus Christ. God does not delight in the death of the wicked. There is certainly a sense in which the satisfaction of

God's justice pleases him insofar as it glorifies these attributes of his glorious being, this does not tell the whole story of the infinite God. God shows goodness to his enemies. We see this in his sending food and rain upon both the just and the unjust. We are exhorted to love those who do not love us, and in this way reflect the pattern of God, our spiritual Father. We show love to our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. This is painful and difficult for us to do, but the duty is ours because it is the pattern of God himself.

And how thankful we ought to be for this pattern! If we reject it, we imply that we do not wish God to show such love to us. God calls us to love our enemies because he loved us when we were at war with him. To reject our duty in these things is to reject the grace of God upon which the duty is based.

This pattern comes to its greatest expression in the Lord Jesus Christ. Earthly Israel rejected him which was the precursor to their final end as a theocratic nation. Yet Jesus did not rejoice in their downfall—even though they made themselves his enemy. Instead, he wept and lamented for Jerusalem even as David lamented over Saul: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:37-38).

Without this grace, there is no salvation. We were enemies of God when he reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son. We do good to our enemies because God showed eternal goodness to us when we were in the same condition. The gift

CHAPTER 1

of God for us is thus reflected in our lives even as we mirror the life of David and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2

Chapter 2

#2A - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 2:1-7

The books of Samuel have been characterized by transitions. We have moved from the time of the Judges to the era of the kings. We witness the fall of the house of Eli and the rise of the young boy Samuel as a prophet-priest in Israel. The kingship of Saul falls in judgment while the kingdom of David triumphs after a season of suffering. The story is characterized by dynamic movement. The dramatic plot develops through conflict and battle which is slowly resolved with victory for the servants of God and the downfall of his enemies.

On a personal level, David seems to have finally reached a point of peace and resolution. Saul has died, along with Jonathan his son. Although David lamented Israel's loss, the effect is that both Israel's king and his heir apparent are no longer in the picture. David seems poised to take the throne of the kingdom promised to him and sealed in his anointing many years earlier.

As 2 Samuel 3:1 states: “David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.”

This is a good reminder that while our battle with the kingdom of darkness may vacillate in intensity through various seasons, it does not take place all at once. Even as our personal sanctification is gradual and progressive, so the vanquishing of Satan’s kingdom through the worldwide preaching of the Gospel is a slow process. Even times of victory will be mixed with suffering and lamentation. “Progress” will be made. Enemies will fall. Temptations will be overcome. But we will never have total victory in this life. The word of God will be sweet in our mouths as we witness true triumphs of faith, but at times it will be bitter in our stomachs as we experience that furious wrath of the evil one who knows his time is short (Rev. 10:9).

Chapter 2 records both moments of victory but also elements of continued conflict. It begins with the anointing of David as King over Judah. David was previously anointed by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16. This was a prophetic anointing that signified God’s choice of him. It was also a visible means by which God equipped him with the invisible power of the Spirit of God. Jesus was similarly anointed by the Spirit in his baptism. This did not mean that Jesus had already assumed the full privileges of the throne of God. That would have to wait until his ascension and royal session at the right hand of the Father, when he received the Spirit’s anointing in consummate fullness.

As with Jesus, so it is with David. The first anointing was a prophetic, performed by Samuel. This anointing is from

the people of Judah and marks the first step in his assuming the actual kingship over the nation. It begins with Judah, the royal tribe that is his own. Back in Genesis, the patriarch Jacob declared that the scepter would not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes. The obedience of the peoples would be his (Gen. 49:9-10). Interestingly this prophecy also indicated the royal crown would be accompanied by a "cross" of suffering in poetic imagery that referenced bloody red colors. The prophecy is somewhat vague and shadowy —as all prophecy tends to be. But it comes to clear provisional fulfillment in David's life and final realization in Jesus.

David's anointing brings blessing to the people. Those who honor God will be honored by him. Those who oppose him will come to ruin. The people of Judah not only anointed David, but they reflected his God-centered character in their treatment of Saul. David lamented Saul's death and the people of Judah cared for his body. As they showed loyalty to God's king, so under the new king's blessing God will show steadfast love and faithfulness to them.

The logic here is simple. The way of the world is to constantly switch allegiances to those who seize power. The problem is that in so doing we compromise our integrity and call into question the validity of our oath of allegiance. David and the people of Judah have proven that their loyalty is to God's appointed king. Standing behind the king's person is the king's office. Behind this is the sovereign will and appointment of God.

In the fullness of time, God revealed to the whole world his choice to be the king and head over all: Jesus Christ. Every knee must bow to him. He rules and reigns in heaven. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that will endure for all generations. His power will not change hands. However, on earth, there will be times when it appears that Satan's kingdom is advancing and devouring the kingdom of God. We may be tempted to vacillate in our allegiance. If it appears that the evil one is winning, perhaps it is better to live as his slave than to die as a servant of God.

But in Jesus victory is not only certain, it has already been obtained in him. Anointed by the Spirit's power he has poured it out on his church. The Gospel is advancing. The kingdom of God is spreading throughout the world amid great conflict and suffering. The kingdom of God is also growing in our hearts after the same pattern. We slowly die more and more to sin and live to righteousness.

Our faith and loyalty are due to Jesus Christ. He has set us free from the tyranny of the devil. Those who honor him he will honor. Those who sacrifice for him will not fail to receive the reward. After the cross, the crown will come.

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

#2B - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 2:8-39

The death of Saul seemed to bring an end to the conflict between the two kingdoms in the womb of Israel. What appeared to be a definitive “victory” turned out to be only the beginning of a gradual process. The rise of David was inevitable, but would not take place all at once. David’s house grew stronger only gradually (3:1). David is not a true king, but only over the tribe of Judah. The remnants of Saul’s kingdom must be “cleared away” for David to assume the fullness of the throne.

The focus shifts away from Saul to other important personnel in his government. In our country, the executive branch has several secretaries that make up his cabinet, as well as the joint chiefs of staff of the armed forces. They have a vested interest in doing whatever they can to remain in power.

The chapter focuses on Abner the son of Ner. He was Saul’s military commander. As a fighting man, he knows the nature of human power. He knows how to seize it and how to preserve it. Although Saul has died he does not wish to relinquish his place in the kingdom of Israel.

Abner had been introduced to us earlier in Samuel. He first appears in 14:50 where he is listed as the commander of Saul’s army and identified as the son of Saul’s uncle. His thick political ties to Saul are mixed with an even thicker blood connection. This all but assured his continuance in his position. He was present at David’s battle with Goliath and was sent to find out David’s identity as the Son of Jesse the Bethlehemite (17:55-58). His presence and detailed knowledge of David assures us that he long ago identified him as a potential threat to power. Surely

he who defeated the giant as a boy might be able to seize the throne for himself!

God made a fool of Abner in 1 Samuel 26 when David was able to sneak into Saul's camp where both he and Abner lay slumbering due to a deep sleep from the Lord that had come upon them (26:12). David took Saul's spear and water jar as proof of his proximity to them, publically calling out Abner for his failure to protect his Lord (26:14-16).

There is clearly some deep history between Abner and David. Not only is Abner a man who inherently desires power, but he is also one who shares Saul's hatred, jealousy, and fear of David.

It should come as no surprise that after the death of Saul, it is Abner who takes Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and makes him king over Israel. Note the contrast with David. David is made king over Judah but by the public acclamation of the tribe's official representatives. Ish-bosheth is installed as king from the top down by the most powerful remnant of Saul's government: the command of the military. Ish-bosheth's reign proves to be very short—a last-ditch “Hail Mary” effort to cling to power.

The implication is that although Saul is dead the conflict will continue. God's enemies are not vanquished all at once. So also in our battle with the kingdom of darkness Christ deals the dragon and his forces a death blow and mortal wound on the cross. Although this assures their ultimate defeat, it also increases their fury and wrath. They are motivated by hatred and vengeance, not the hope of victory.

The text also includes three sons of Zeruiah: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. These men ally themselves with King David. We also read of Joab. As Abner was to Saul, so Joab is to David.

Abner and Joab meet and agree to settle the conflict through a representative competition to the death. They gather at the pool of Gibson. The young men of their forces. Many of them died, each opponent killing one another simultaneously. Those who live by the sword die by the sword no matter what army you align with. Eventually, Abner's forces are beaten and Abner cowardly flees to live another day. He wants to hold on to power and is willing to risk the lives of others. But when his own life is at stake he does whatever he can to preserve it.

Asahel (one of the sons of Zeruiah) is as fast as a gazelle, so he runs after Abner until he comes within shouting distance. Abner always has his eye on people's powers and abilities. He longs for power and he interprets the world through this lens. He also assumes that others operate in the same way according to the same principles, projecting his power-centered mindset onto others.

Realizing he is about to be overtaken, he tempts Asahel with the spoils of war: "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men and take his spoil" (2:21). Abner assumes Asahel desires worldly gains in his pursuit. Surely it will be easier for him to defeat a young man than take up arms against a mighty commander of Israel. The text seems to assume that this "young man" was one of Abner's soldiers. See how quickly he throws his comrade in arms under the bus simply to save his own skin?

Asahel doesn't take the bait and continues his hot pursuit. Abner tries a second time to deter him with an indirect threat strangely tied to the prospect of his own shame: "Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab" (2:22). It's not hard to understand the deterring force of his threat against Asahel. his appeal to his personal shame in having to face Joab after so doing is frankly a bit odd. Surely this will cause issues for Joab, but why would this matter to Asahel? Joab's self-focus blinds him to the folly of his arguments. He prioritizes his own interests above those of others he places greater value on the public shame he will face than being guilty of murder! How twisted our ethical processes become when we prioritize self above all!

But Abner is good on his threat. He thrusts his spear at Asahel (apparently backward) and pierces him in the stomach until the end comes out his back. Abner's sinful brutality is highlighted in his manner of murder. All who come upon Asahel stand still in shock when they find his body.

Abner continues his retreat. Now Joab and Abisai continue the pursuit until sunset when they reach the hill of Ammah. He reaches reinforcements from the tribe of Benjamin. Abner's strategy in his retreat is now clear. He first attempted to win the victory through a small representative battle, using the young men of his army. When that ended in a bloodbath of a statement he again seeks another way to risk the lives of others to save his own and preserve his power.

In this, Abner mirrors his master, Saul. He also stands in contrast to David. Abner risks the lives of others to save himself.

David risks his life to save others. One mirrors the future Savior who gave his life for the salvation of the world. The other mirrors the prince of darkness and the kingdoms of this world.

Regardless of Abner's motives in this ordeal, God remains the sovereign Lord working everything behind the scenes according to his will. As Abner is assembled with the armies of Israel, he warns of the potential destruction that awaits them all as the nation stands on the brink of civil war. Abner's words prevail upon Joab, even his motives are less than consistent and pure.

For the time being the war will cease and there will be peace in Israel. The cease-fire will only prove to be temporary but is a preview of better things to come.

Indeed, when David ascends to the throne the temporary peace of this cease-fire will become a more permanent characteristic of his kingdom. The war within Israel will cease under his reign. At his coronation peace offerings will sacramentally signify this reality (2 Sam. 6:17). Through David's throne peace will come. An even greater peace will be attained through his son, Solomon. His name is derived from the Hebrew word "Shalom," meaning "peace."

Each in their own way but types and shadows of an even greater royal figure: David's son and David's Lord. One greater than Solomon would arise from their loins. His name would be called the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). As with David, this peace would not be obtained with conflict. With Jesus, his foes

would not be vanquished through the sword using intimidation, threats, and violence. When his disciples attempted to use these weapons, he told them to put their swords in their place, even healing those harmed by them. His conflict was won through love expressed in self-sacrifice. Like David, he overcame evil with good. He loved his enemies and prayed for those who persecuted him.

He calls us to do the same. This commandment is truly difficult, but it comes with a special promise: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9).

3

Chapter 3

#3 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 3:1-39

Although the kingdom has been stripped from Saul, its remnants have been seized by Abner, his military commander. As we saw in our last devotional, Abner is a man who views the world through a simple lens. There is one category with which to view the world. There is one priority that is higher than any other: gaining and maintaining power. For him, violence and bloodshed are necessary means to a greater end. Yet the pursuit of power must be mixed with shrewdness. Where war is necessary, it will be waged. But where strategic alliances are possible, those too are legitimate avenues. The key point is this: power is the ultimate goal.

Ultimately Abner is fighting a losing battle. The house of Saul grows weaker while David only grows stronger. Saul's sons are diminishing in number and power. Jonathan has already passed. Ish-bosheth is but a puppet of Abner. David's sons only increase, as indicated by the long list of those born at Hebron

at the beginning of this chapter.

Behind the earthly plots and maneuverings of men is the unchangeable plan and promise of God. He has chosen David and has promised him the kingdom. What God has decreed will certainly come to pass. We see it slowly unfolding before our eyes as we read through the narrative of Samuel.

Seeing David's continued rise, Abner plots a counter-move. Knowing that Ish-bosheth is but a shell and figurehead, he pursues his true goal: increasing his personal power. He takes Saul's concubine and goes into her. Her proximity to Saul allows Abner to plan a claim to the throne through her offspring. The offspring would be an illegitimate heir, but Abner cares nothing for "legitimacy." Having a child through Saul's concubine constitutes adultery. His plan in this regard is a conspiracy to overthrow Ish-bosheth. But in Abner's mind, this is all justified because it promotes his chief and highest end: power.

Ish-bosheth questions Abner's actions as would be his "royal" prerogative. Abner is offended that anyone would even challenge him: "Am I a dog's head of Judah?" (3:8). Note his line of reasoning: his status and importance justify his sinful course of behavior. In his ethical calculations, power trumps purity. His inflated sense of self-importance hardens him to any form of accountability, even from the highest authority (i.e. the king). Abner answers reasonable inquiries to hold him accountable with threats and intimidation. Ish-bosheth succumbs to these tactics, shrinking back in fear (3:11).

Abner realizes that his attempt to retain the kingship of Saul is a losing battle. He has simply been injecting phremeldohyde into the rotting corpse of Saul's kingdom. His strategy for maintaining power needs to change.

We all know the old saying: "If you can't beat them, join them!" Abner shrewdly plots a last-ditch effort to maintain some position of power and influence. He will align with David and seek some place in his kingdom. Better to live on our knees, than die on our feet. The dead, after all, have no power whatsoever—however nobly or ignobly they sought to pursue it. The identity of Abner's enemy shifts according to the circumstances: he who has power is to be my friend, and he who does not can be cast aside.

David, of course, is ignorant of the immediate circumstances surrounding Abner's pursuit of power. As a man of God, he returns evil with good. He prays for his persecutors. He does not rejoice in their defeat but grieves their destruction.

Abner knows this about David. As a member of the kingdom of darkness, and an imitator of his father, the devil, his shrewdness and subtlety move to an even deeper level. It is the way of Satan to masquerade as an angel of light. In the Book of Revelation, we are told that he has the voice of a dragon but the appearance of a lamb (Rev. 13). The devil's twisted method at times leads him to imitate the principles of transformation in the kingdom of light. Sinners who have been exposed will "confess" their sins and "repent." They will do just enough to make it seem like they are sincere. They know that the heart of the saints is such that they exercise charity to others, always seeking to

give the benefit of the doubt when possible. In this way, Satan manipulates God's grace. He uses the call for Christian charity as a means to obtain cover for his evil purposes.

Abner knows that David does not desire nor rejoice in the downfall of his enemies. He knows David would eagerly welcome his "repentance." Man of peace, David would welcome an offer of peace, even if there were risks involved for himself. For David, it is better to be wronged while being gracious than risk rejecting a sincere offer of peace.

Abner has hatched an ingenious plan. he will manipulate David's God-centered heart, preparing a trap on the path of grace to obtain power on the path of death. Abner sends messengers to David asking for a covenant of peace as well as a place to assist him in the establishment of his kingdom over Israel (2 Sam. 3:12). The use of messengers is shrewd. If David does not think well of his proposal, he has a buffer to protect himself. David agrees but requires the return of Michal, his wife, whom he had won from the hand of Saul for the bride price of 100 foreskins of the Philistines. Michal had earlier helped David escape from the hand of her father (1 Samuel 19). Saul had then given her as a wife to another man (1 Samuel 25:24). The time has come for her to return to her rightful husband. This action will not only tie up an important loose end for David, but it will also test Abner's sincerity.

Abner makes good on both his promises, bringing Michal back to David and leading the elders of Israel to submit to his rule. There is formal peace between David and Abner. Abner has not violated the terms of his covenant with David. But

as readers, we know there are twisted motives beneath his apparent “alliance” with David.

Joab sees right through Abner’s facade. To be sure, Abner may well have continued to formally support David so long as it assured him a place of power. But he knows that his loyalty has sinister, self-centered motives. Joab has already suffered loss through his brutal hands when Abner killed his brother Asahel. He knows he is a man of violence. But Joab also has a heart that is not right before God—one that does not reflect the pattern of David, his king.

Joab’s heart is filled with anger and vengeance. He may have let Abner go earlier when he had no choice. But now the murderer of his brother has a place alongside him in David’s kingdom. David was a man who returned evil with good and so reflected the heart and work of Jesus Christ. Returning evil with good sounds very nice, until that means someone who deeply hurt you gets away with it.

Joab takes it upon himself to deal with this situation on his own terms. Feigning peace with Abner, he asks to speak to him privately. When the meeting is arranged, Joab strikes Abner in the stomach and kills him. The text highlights his vengeful intent, noting that he killed him “for the blood of Asahel his brother” (2 Sam. 3:27).

To be sure, there are levels of meaning and significance here. From David’s point of view, Joab’s actions are a violation of the covenant made between him and Abner. Formally there was peace between them. Previous transgressions had been

implicitly pardoned through his kingly power. A “second chance” had been granted at the highest level. David was otherwise ignorant of the questionable motives and intent of Abner clearly revealed in his going into the concubine of Saul and attitude towards Ish-bosheth. Abner’s maneuverings were shrewd and calculated. But he could not escape the justice of God.

From Joab’s point of view, his execution of Abner was a vengeful act of vigilante justice. It was a sin before God and a sin against David the king. He sought to overcome evil with evil and fight fire with fire. On the earthly level, we can certainly understand the earthly justification one might make for taking such an action. But it is not of God’s kingdom to overcome our enemies in this way. The proper approach was articulated earlier by Abigail, who urged David not to take vengeance into his own hands, but to trust that the LORD himself would deal with his enemies in his time and in his way.

In the end, both Joab and Abner reveal themselves to be men of this world. Power, vengeance, and bloodshed are the fruit of their ways. God brings them both to an unceremonious end in God’s providential justice. David shines forth the grace and peace of the Prince of Peace to come from his loins. Indeed, as David mourned Saul so now he mourns Abner. The Lord repays the evildoer according to his wickedness. But to the merciful God shows mercy.

4

Chapter 4

#4 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 4:1-12

Abner was a man of blood. He lived by the sword and died by the sword. He was a member of the kingdom of darkness revealing the pattern of his father, the devil. Joab was an ally of David. He faithfully fought with and for the man after God's own heart. Yet his heart proved to be in another place. Abner entered death through the main door, suffering evil for the evil he had done to others. Joab entered death through the back door, enduring suffering with God's king but failing in patience and love, taking personal vengeance on Abner by his own hands. On the surface, both seem quite different, but in the end, they turn out the same.

By contrast, there is King David a living type of Jesus Christ, his greater Son. He is also a pattern of the true life of faith. David knew that vengeance belonged to God alone. The Lord declares: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." His faith in God's prerogative manifested itself in his doing good to his enemies

and praying for those who persecuted them. This faith was so deep it allowed him to grieve, lament, and mourn the death of his enemies. In David's interactions with Saul and Abner, we see the heart of Jesus who prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors and lamented their destruction. David and Jesus patiently suffered trial and loss in this life because they knew they had a better and lasting possession in the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of Saul is growing weaker and weaker. Saul and Jonathan are dead. Abner and his shrewd maneuverings have been removed from the scene. Only Ish-bosheth, the puppet of Abner, remains. Ish-bosheth realizes that he is in a corner and that his time is short. His courage has failed him and he is filled with dismay. Saul's son had two men who served as captains of raiding bands. They are the last remnants of authority and power from Saul's old kingdom: a far cry from mighty Abner! Seeing Ish-bosheth's weakness and hoping to bring tribute to David to ingratiate themselves with him, they stab the king in the stomach and take his head to Hebron where David dwells.

We have seen this story before. These men are not the first who think they will do David a favor by destroying his enemies for him. Recall the tale of the Amalekite who took Saul's crown and armlet as trophies to David, declaring that he had vanquished his enemy on his behalf. The Amalekite was lying about the details. He did not kill him, but only found him after he died. David, ignorant of these details was innocent of judicial malfeasance. The Amalekite came as his own accuser essentially confessing his sin. David executes him forthwith. He has no thirst for vengeance. His heart is for peace and the glory of the Lord. It is God's to judge his enemies.

The story repeats itself with Rechab and Baanah. Like the other parallel figures in the narrative, they assume David operates according to the principles of this world. They sincerely believe they will be received as heroes and be granted a place in David's kingdom. How different things turn out for them! As with the Amalekite and with Joab, so also with these men. They are executed at the command of the king, and their bodies are hung beside the pool of Hebron.

There will be no sinful wrath or vengeance in David's kingdom. It is a kingdom of peace and righteousness. It self-consciously understands that this kingdom is subservient to a greater king who alone holds life and death in his hands. Judgment belongs to him, not man.

The members of this kingdom walk in love, grace, forgiveness, and peace. They do not return evil for evil. They overcome evil with good. They show love to their enemies.

Thus it was with Jesus and his forerunner, David. Interestingly, David's Christ-like compassion and mercy are anticipated in this passage in the mention of Saul's grandson Mephibosheth. Only referenced in passing in chapter 4, he will dramatically reappear in 2 Samuel 9. Although Mephibosheth regards himself as a "dead dog" before the king—the last remnants of Saul's forgotten kingdom—David manifests the mercy of the king of kings to him. In contrast to Abner, Joab, Rechab, and Baanah there is no jealousy, vengeance, or hatred in David. He does not lust for power but yearns for God's glory. He knows that the power of God's heavenly grace is greater than earthly violence. In restoring Mephibosheth permanently to his dining

table, David places a capstone on his reflection of the glory of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Thanks be to God that grace, mercy, and love are at the core of his character! He delights more in mercy than in vengeance. We are all but dead dogs before the Lord of all, but in grace, he has made us his children. We once walked according to the course of this world, filled with vengeance, violence, and self-centeredness. We were his enemies, but died for us to make us his friends. In Jesus, God's goodness has overcome our evil, and mercy has triumphed over judgment.

5

Chapter 5

#5 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 5:1-25

The last remnants of Saul's fallen kingdom have been swept away. Those who exalted themselves were humbled, but those who humbled themselves were exalted. Abner presumed he could shrewdly maneuver his way into David's kingdom, but God brought him low in judgment. Saul's earthly kingdom was but a dark earthly shadow of a spiritual domain of darkness. The spiritual principles it manifested transcended its earthly bounds. Even from within David's kingdom, we see its ominous shadow. Joab, for example, was outwardly a member of God's chosen kingdom under David. But inwardly he was gripped by vengeance and violence. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. The kingdom of darkness will at times covertly infiltrate the walls of the city of light. David will later be temporarily lured into its snare by Satan through Bathsheba. In the fullness of times, Satan will enter into Judas Iscariot (one of Christ's disciples) and betray him to death. Among the sheep of God, we will find those who are

really ravenous wolves.

Whether it is David's outward enemies or the double agents within his kingdom, chapter 5 marks the beginning of his formal triumph as king. Having been anointed king by Judah (2:1-7), David is now anointed king over all Israel. Samuel's prophetic anointing in 1 Samuel 16 is now consummated by the anointing of the people. This marks the ratification of a royal covenant between David and the nation. It also indicates an implicit limitation on the royal office insofar as it has a civil aspect. In contrast to Ish-bosheth who was installed from "top-down" by Abner, David is anointed and appointed from the "bottom up." The people willingly receive his rule at the appointment of God's divine decree. The king is thus subject to God himself (the ultimate source of power). This power is delegated to the king through the people.

A similar principle applies today with regard to church office. God equips men to lead and rule his church in the love and gentleness of Christ. These are not imposed from the top down (as the Romanists and others would claim). They are recognized by the people as those possessing the gifts for office. The people nominate and elect their leaders, willingly entrusting authority to them. The authority of the special office of elder flows out of the general office of believers in the church. They do not have authority from themselves. Nothing is done by force (as happened in Saul's kingdom!). If even the royal office of the King in the OT followed these principles, how much more so for church offices today!

This principle is also useful in its general equity for a proper

view of the authority of civil government. The pattern of the passage is one in which civil authority flows from God himself, to the people of a nation, and through them to their elected representatives. This means that while leaders are invested with authority from God, they are also subject to accountability to the people who elected them. In many nations that have come under the influence of Christian principles, this has manifested itself in a regular cycle of elections in which the people are free to assess the faithfulness and effectiveness of their leaders.

But the passage is not primarily about the civil kingdom of God's providence in this world. It illustrates for us the principles of the kingdom of the world to come.

David's reign is stated to be a total of 40 years. This is significant in that the number "40" represents a time period of important leaders and eras in Israel's history. Othniel and Gideon gave the land rest for 40 years (Judg. 3:11, 8:28). Eli judged Israel for 40 years (1 Sam. 4:18). Later Jehoash (a relatively "good" king) will reign 40 years in Jerusalem (2 Kings 12:2). It's also worthy noting that the waters of the flood came down for 40 days and night (Gen. 7:12) and that Jesus fasted in the desert 40 days and nights. The number 40 doesn't seem to be automatically associated with good or bad eras. Biblical examples include both, sometimes in a mixture.

More significant in the passage is the presence of the idea of a "covenant." King David makes a covenant with the people of Israel in 5:3. This is a covenant between men. But behind this covenant is one between David and the Lord. This covenant will be more fully declared in 2 Samuel 7, but we see its fruits

already anticipated in this chapter.

The people acknowledge the ultimate source of this covenant in God himself. It is the Lord who has declared that David would be prince and shepherd over Israel (5:2). The people ratify and acquiesce in God's choice through their "election" of David expressed in his anointing. But behind the choice of the people is the choice of God. likewise in God's covenant of grace with us, his will has the ultimate say. But our wills sweetly and freely acquiesce in his sovereign wisdom by his grace. How different Saul behaved! He used force, threats, and intimidation to coerce the wills of his people. The people freely chose Saul, but he did not respect the freedom of their will in his leadership. Force and threats were his ways of "persuasion." Not so with David and not so with the Lord. He makes his people willing in the day of his power (Psalm 110:3).

David's rule is filled with goodness, love, and gentleness to his people. He has demonstrated an inclination to show love to even his enemies. But he is also a defender of Israel and an administrator of justice. He is an agent of wrath upon the enemies of God. The Jebusites are among those enemies. They were not fully driven out by the tribe of Benjamin and occupied the city of Jerusalem (Judges 1:21). What they left undone David completes. The Jebusites believe they are immune from threat given the strong position of the city. Moreover, they taunt David and consider him weak, claiming that even the lame and the blind among them could defeat him. David and his men sneak in the city through the underground water shaft and take the city for himself. David completes what Benjamin left undone: the Jebusites are driven out. The city becomes Israel's

capital and takes the name “The City of David.”

The Philistines also are defeated at David’s hand. At the direction of God’s revealed will, he defeats them in battle and carries their idols away. He acknowledges that any power he has comes from God alone, to whom he gives all the glory (5:19). The enemies of God’s kingdom are thus fully driven out under David’s reign.

The Jebusites and Philistines oppose him and come to ruin. But Hiram King of Tyre pays him tribute and acknowledges that God has established his kingdom in him. This anticipates the future fullness of God’s kingdom through David’s son, Jesus Christ. People from all nations would bow the knee to the King of kings, the only name under heaven by which men may be saved. In these, we see a type and preview of Jesus’s consummate kingdom.

However, this kingdom has not yet fully come. David is a type and shadow of future things, but he is not the Christ. Verses 13-16 are a clear reminder of this, noting that David took many wives and concubines who gave him many sons and daughters. This was explicitly forbidden by God in Deuteronomy 17:7. Unfortunately David’s desire for Bathsheba (whom he ultimately took as his wife) would serve as a black mark on his otherwise God-centered life. These seeds would be transplanted into the heart of Solomon, whose many foreign wives would turn his heart away from God.

It is only in Jesus that God’s kingdom fully comes. He is a faithful and pure bridegroom for his holy bride, the church. In

CHAPTER 5

sacrificial love, he washes and cleanses her through his word. The Spirit subdues us to his reign so that we might present ourselves as his willing servants. Although we live now in conflict with the kingdom of this world, through love and patience we can be assured that we will inherit the crown of life and reign with him forever and ever.

6

Chapter 6

#6 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 6:1-23

The story of the Ark of God is central to the narrative of the books of Samuel. The Ark was perhaps the most important piece of furniture in the Tabernacle of God. It represented God's heavenly presence as it dwelt among the Israelites.

We haven't heard anything about the Ark since 1 Samuel 14:18, where Saul asked that the Ark be brought to him in Gibeah of Benjamin when the Philistines were about to attack him. Before this, the Ark had been carried into battle by the Israelites who wrongly believed it had "magical" inherent powers to protect them. In judgment for their unbelief, the ark was captured by the Philistines and set up in the temple of Dagon. Israel had departed God in unbelief and sin. God's glory had therefore departed Israel.

But this word of judgment would not be God's last. The departure of God's presence symbolized in the Ark would prove

to be a temporary chastisement upon the nation. The glory-presence of God would return and abide with Israel. Before Saul's request that it be brought to him at Gibeah it had resided at Kiribati-Jearim. It was kept under careful watch in the house of Abinadab by Eleazar for twenty years.

In 2 Samuel 6, the Ark once again takes center stage. God's anointed king has passed through his era of suffering and is about to enter the next phase of his life. Humiliation is giving way to exaltation. Central to this exaltation is the coming of the glory-presence of God to the city of the Great King. The Ark had wandered with the Israelites during their journeys in the wilderness. It had wandered within Israel and even among the Philistines. It now journeys to Jerusalem to take up its place of permanent rest.

God's typological kingdom is coming in fullness. Despite the failure of the wilderness generation to enter the land, and the generation of Joshua to fully subdue the nations within the land, things are finally coming to culmination under God's promised king!

This is a time for rejoicing. God's enemies have been vanquished. God's glory is coming in fullness. David expresses this joy with dancing and sacrifice. The joy is sincere and spontaneous. It is not liturgically planned or appointed. It is a sincere expression of joy at a truly unique redemptive-historical moment in Israel's history. It is also a moment of personal exultation in his life experience. Before this, his life had been characterized by patient suffering and severe hardship. He had wandered as a fugitive for many years under the constant threat

of death at the hand of Saul. The Psalms bear clear testimony to the high levels of anxiety, stress, and anguish he felt during these years.

But now the season of suffering is over. The time of God's triumph has come. Just as people will cheer in the streets at the news of the end of a Great War, so David dances and rejoices in the coming of God's glory-presence to the Holy City. The people shout and sing a song of victory.

We will return to the theme of David's dancing at the end of the chapter. It serves as an "inclusio" bracketing another story in the center of the passage. This central section records the fate of Uzzah who drove the cart carrying the Ark to Jerusalem. He was accompanied by Ahio his brother.

Halfway through the journey tragedy strikes. When the oxen stumble Uzzah puts out his hand to the ark of God and takes hold of it. Immediately he is struck down by the anger of the Lord. Many are puzzled by this detail. Why did God strike him down? Was he not simply trying to preserve the Ark? Was his action not out of respect for God? How could God be so harsh as to put him to death for simply trying to stabilize and protect this important piece of Israel's history and religious worship?

Recall that this is not the first time the Ark of God was carried on a cart. In 1 Samuel 6, the Philistines returned the Ark to Israel after it afflicted the people with tumors and panic. It had no human beings to protect or safeguard it during the journey. It was pulled on a cart with two milk cows. Under God's special care and protection, it made the long journey undamaged from

Ekron to Beth-Shemesh.

If God can preserve his ark under the supervision of two milk cows, surely God will protect his ark when supervised by two men who are image bearers. Although the Philistines were enemies of God, they respected the utter holiness of the Ark. They returned the Ark with guilt offerings in the hopes that God would relent of his judgment against them. They were fully cognizant of the fact that they had to flee God's holy presence represented in the Ark. God will not dwell among evildoers. Although they did not have saving faith in the one true God, they at least respected his holiness.

Recall also that the Ark of God was something that the Israelites ordinarily could not even see. It was to be housed in the Tabernacle in the Holy of Holies. No Israelite was allowed to enter that room except for the High Priest. On the holiest day of the Jewish year, he would enter into this place to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement.

These things were all known to the Israelites, including Uzzah. When he reached out his hand to touch the Ark, he was not acting in faith and reverence. He was not recognizing the unique holiness of the Ark, nor was he remembering God's proven track record of preserving its integrity under his direct sovereign care. His reaching out to stabilize the Ark was an act of unbelief in which he trusted in his human strength above the power of God and a failure to recognize the infinite distance between a holy God and an impure sinner.

David responds in anger at the news of these events. It is not

exactly clear as to the specific object of his anger. Was his anger over the fact that Uzzah touched the Ark and sinned against God? Was it over the fact that these tragic events occurred during a time that was otherwise one of overwhelming joy and therefore tainted the time of God's victory? Or was he angry at God for striking down Uzzah? Given his reticence to receive the Ark of God after hearing this news, the latter seems unlikely.

Ironically, instead of taking the Ark to himself, he entrusts it Obed-edom the Gittite. A Gittite is a native of the Philistine city of Gath! Irony of ironies! Obed-edom was likely among those who came with David when he left Philistia (see 2 Sam. 15:18). He is a Gentile who has bowed the knee to God's true king. The Jewish people represented in Uzzah do not respect God's holiness, but the Gentile Philistines do!

Obed-edom is blessed with the presence of God's ark in his house. Upon hearing this David eventually brings the Ark from Obed-edom to Jerusalem, resuming his joyful dancing. He even wears a linen ephod. This was a piece of clothing fit for a priest. David thus indicates that a day is coming when Israel will have a priest-king who will bring in the fullness of God's kingdom.

After this "central" passage telling the story of Uzzah and the Ark we return to the theme of David dancing before the Lord. There seems to be a time gap between the two scenes, but the parallels are obvious. This time David's dancing is even more exuberant, bringing embarrassment to Michal his wife. Her concern is focused on how David might have been seen in the eyes of men. His dancing and leaping made him appear un-

kingly. In her mind, a king must maintain a royal decorum in the eyes of men. Dancing and leaping for joy is characteristic of lowly and vulgar men. Michal is preoccupied with appearances. Recall that one of the theme verses of Samuel addresses this very issue: "...the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). David's heart was filled with the joy of the Lord at the moment of God's exaltation and triumph. Whatever lack of external decorum characterized his response, his heart was completely filled with joy in the Lord his God.

Michal looked only at the outward appearance. Although she voices a concern for David's reputation, it seems clear that she is also deeply concerned about her own. David is the king. What he does reflects upon her. Ironically, she gives the appearance of being concerned about David, but hidden within her heart is a concern that is focused more on herself. Note especially in this context her reference to "his servant's female servants" (6:20). These would likely have been under her supervision. She is embarrassed at David's behavior and how it reflects poorly upon her. David's joy is God-centered and flows from the heart. Michal's shame is man-centered. She gives the appearance of being concerned for David's reputation but deep down she is concerned for herself. For this, she has no child until the day of her death.

There is much in this passage that points us to Jesus Christ and his coming Kingdom. David temporarily wore an ephod as a King-priest, rejoicing before the Lord. Jesus will come as the final priest and king to bring God's ultimate triumph in his resurrection. Jesus is the holy presence of God. In him, we

behold the glory-presence of God. This presence goes not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Obed-edom's caretaking of the ark anticipates a day when the presence of God will go out to the nations—not for their judgment as it did in Philistia, but for their salvation. The coming of God's kingdom in Jesus will be accompanied with metaphorical dancing and joy. When the prodigal son returns to his father in Jesus's parable, there is music and dancing in his house (Luke 15:25). So there is great joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. When the kingdom of God arrives, a heavenly flute plays a song of glory which compels one to dance with joy (cf. Luke 7:32).

In Christ, we see the fullness of what was typified in David. The death of Uzzah and the barrenness of Michal are reminders that in David God's final kingdom had not yet come. But in Jesus, there is life, not death. His presence brings salvation, not judgment. In him, there is fruitfulness, not barrenness. In him, we have the permanent possession of the glory-presence of God. Christ has ascended to the heavenly Jerusalem, the true city of the living God. From there he has sent his Spirit who will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

7

Chapter 7

#7 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 7:1-29

With the Ark of God now in Jerusalem, God's promises have reached their culmination. This is true for the nation of Israel more broadly and for David personally. Up to this point both Israel and their king had lived in restlessness. The conquest under Joshua was supposed to bring them to an era of rest. But their failure to fully drive out the nations along with their unfaithfulness during the era of the Judges left them with multiple thorns in their sides. David also has been living as a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. Neither Israel nor David had enjoyed the blessing of rest since they had begun their journeys at the call of the LORD.

Now in 2 Samuel 7, we see David (and through him the nation) finally attain God's promised rest. Yet David is not content to leave things as is. He dwells in a royal house of cedar, but God's Ark dwells in a tent. There is a profound disconnect between the dwelling of the earthly king and that of the heavenly king.

As a man after God's own heart with an eye single to his glory, he desires to appropriately house the Ark of God with the splendor of a heavenly king. The tabernacle must become a temple-palace. At first, Nathan the prophet encourages David in his proposed construction project.

But that night the word of the LORD comes to him to direct him otherwise. God had been with his people since he took them up out of the land of Egypt. Not once did he command his people to build him a house of cedar. Their identity during their entire history has been that of a sojourning and traveling people. Note the parallel between God and his people. Just as they sojourn in this world, so God sojourns with him. Just as, his people have no permanent dwelling place on earth, so God dwells in a temporary shelter in their midst. They wandered in a land not their own looking for a better country that God had promised to them. David's enthronement in the earthly Jerusalem is a typological fulfillment of God's promises. But this does not change their fundamental spiritual identity. Although the full establishment of the nation in the earthly land is the fruit of God's promises, it is not the final fulfillment of his word.

Even at the apex of its earthly glory, the land of Israel is not their final hope. God had promised them a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Israel's history was replicated and recapitulated in the life of David. Just as Israel had to wander in suffering before tasting the peace of the promised land, so David had to wander in suffering before ascending the throne. Although he had multiple opportunities to speed up this process by taking

justice into his own hands, he patiently endured mistreatment, returning evil with good. How could David do this? It was because deep down he knew that his life on this earth was one grand test of his faith in unseen realities. Even as the enthroned king he must maintain this pilgrim identity.

For this reason, David himself is not permitted to build a permanent resting place for God. This task is delegated to a son who will come from his loins. Even as the king David must still live by faith in God's covenant promises. Here God confirms these promises with a covenant oath. David's son will not only build him a glorious house, but God will establish his house and kingdom (see verses 11 and 13). Note the reciprocity of God's covenant promises. God will build himself a house even as he establishes the "house" of David's son.

But who is this son? In one respect we can certainly see indications of Solomon's life and reign. Solomon will construct a physical temple for God. He will also later fall and require God's discipline due to his sin in the latter part of his reign (14).

But other aspects of the promise cannot be satisfied in Solomon. After all, the throne of his kingdom will be established "forever" (13, 16). The force of this word in the context of God's kingdom-promise cannot be satisfied by even the greatest of mere human kings. As long as they might reign they will eventually die and suffer the fate of all fallen sinners. Only an eternal kingdom can satisfy this promise of God.

Moreover, this chapter promises that David's son will have a special and unique Father-Son relationship with God. To be

sure, God's people are sons of God. Israel itself is referred to as God's son throughout the Exodus story. But this passage indicates that the Father-Son relationship between God and this future king is something greater than this. Indeed, it is tied to the eternal kingdom promised to him.

David's response is one of overwhelming gratitude, which he expresses in prayer. Note the reciprocal nature of his covenant union with God. God speaks to him, and he in turn speaks back to God. Fellowship with the LORD is through the word. His focus is on God's power and grace. All glory goes to him. No glory is claimed for himself. He simply asks that God confirm the word of promise to his throne and kingdom and bring about all that he has promised. It is only through this promise that David can find the courage to even pray to God. Although now a great king, he remains but a humble shepherd boy before his God and Heavenly Father, entirely dependent upon his strength for victory and glory. If David (among the greatest of the saints) has this attitude before God, how much more should we!?

In the fullness of times, the true identity of this promised king will be revealed. He will be a true son of David, descending from his body according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). The Gospel writers go out of their way to point out that his family was from the house and lineage of David (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:27). Matthew also explicitly traces his genealogical descent from David's royal line, preserved even through the judgment of exile (Matt. 1:1-17).

This son of David is also the Son of God. To him, God promised that "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." The

son of David born to Mary was also the “Son of the Most High” who will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and whose kingdom shall have no end (Luke 1:31-33). He is not only a temporal son of God but the eternal Son of God, only-begotten of the Father. Only an eternal Son can establish an eternal kingdom.

Like David, he would first undergo a season of wandering and suffering. The Son of Man had no place to lay his head. He came to his own and his own did not receive him. As Saul persecuted David in wrath and jealousy, so the Jewish leaders persecuted Jesus. They crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. In his incarnation he pitched a tent (i.e. tabernacled) among us (John 1:14). This wandering tabernacle of suffering became a temple of glory in his resurrection from the dead.

In Jesus God’s holy temple is being built. It is not constructed with rocks of the earth but with living stones of the saints. Jesus is the cornerstone of this temple, in whom we are built into a spiritual house where God dwells by the Spirit. Just as David and Jesus were stones rejected by men, so also are we in the eyes of the world. We are rejected by men, but chosen and precious in the sight of God. Through the Son of God, we too become adopted children of the Father. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a people for God’s own possession. As sojourners and exiles on the earth, we live in patience, abstaining from the passions of the flesh. Our citizenship is in heaven. We look not to rule on earth, but to serve God in heaven. Our conquest is through the cross. Our victory is through suffering. Love and goodness fill our hearts, not jealousy and vengeance.

We can patiently endure trials because we know God's promise is sure. The Father's promises are ultimately to his Son, and only through him to us. God will no more break his promises to us than he can break his promise to his eternal Son. It is impossible for God to lie. He has also confirmed his promises with an oath (see Heb. 6:13-20). That promise is eternal life. Nothing on earth can compare with it. All flesh is as grass and shall pass away. It is only in God's Son that we can endure forever.

8

Chapter 8

#8 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 8:1-18

God is establishing David's kingdom. The reign he was promised in his anointing by Samuel is finally coming to fruition. The Ark of God has been brought to Jerusalem. God's promises have come to him through the Prophet Nathan. The glory of David's kingdom will be beyond his wildest dreams. Before him lies not only the regal glory of a temporal kingdom, but the seed of an eternal kingdom to come through his greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This Son will bring an eternal kingdom that will endure forever. David's kingdom is its real type and shadow, but the final kingdom has not yet come. Just as David endured suffering before his glory, so Jesus will endure humiliation before his exaltation. The crown of thorns precedes the crown of glory. As with Christ so with his servants—whether in David's day or ours.

In chapter 8 we read of the victories of David over the surrounding nations. The Philistines, Moabites, Syrians,

Edomites, Ammonites, and others all fall at his powerful hand. Although Joshua had settled them in the land many years before, the job was left unfinished due to a failure of faith in the Israelites. What was left unfinished is now completed by David. Through him, the promises of God through Moses and Joshua reach their typological fulfillment.

But not all the nations are defeated under his hand. Some, like Toi King of Hamath, offer his tribute and bring words of blessing. The defeated nations also bring gold, silver, and bronze. David does not keep these for himself but dedicates them to the Lord. The armies of the nations are also commandeered by David. The enemy soldiers who fought against him now fight for him as members of his army!

With Moab he draws a line, distinguishing those who will be put to death from those who will be spared. David is a king of justice and will by no means clear the guilty. But he is also a king of mercy, graciously pardoning sinners and making them his servants.

In this, he administered justice and equity to the people. This phrase has been hijacked in our modern political context to mean the opposite of what God originally intended. Today “justice and equity” refers to policies that guarantee equality of outcomes in the socio-economic life of a people. Moreover, it is combined with a principle of retributive vengeance such that true “equity” can only occur when one group is punished and brought low while the other is exalted. In this way, it speaks of “corporate guilt” when it really means “guilt by association.” It is shrewd and persuasive in its presentation,

appealing to the basest emotions in our sinful nature: envy, jealousy, vengeance, self-righteousness, and anger. Ironically, it reflects the principles of darkness in Saul's kingdom rather than the kingdom of God. It simply borrows the language of the kingdom of righteousness and fills it with new content. Evil masquerades under the cover of good.

The Hebrew word for justice is *mishpat*. Central to its proper administration is the principle of impartiality: "Hear the cases between you brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother and the alien who is with him. You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's" (Deut. 1:16-17). Justice is properly administered when all men are treated equally before the law. Actions are weighed according to whether they conform to God's law. Judgments are not made based on the person's class or even national status. Both the alien and the Israelite brother are the same before the law.

The Hebrew word for equity is *tsadeqah*. It can also simply be translated as "righteousness." In our modern context, equity refers to a guaranteed equal outcome for all the citizens in a country. This is not the way this term is used in the Bible. To be righteous is to conform to God's righteous standard set forth in the law. To administer equity means to conduct oneself after God's commandments and work to encourage others to do the same. To blindly guarantee outcomes is not real equity but inequity. To take from the man who worked hard for his sustenance and give it to one who squandered his wealth in sin simply because it results in an equal outcome is not true

equity. It is the height of injustice. Formal policies that enshrine this practice in a culture are an embedded form of theft and corruption before God.

But the point of this passage is not to instruct us as to how to properly conduct our civil affairs (although it clearly has a general equity in this regard). Its point is to prefigure the greater Kingdom of David's Son, the Lord Jesus.

Through him, God's promises come to full fruition. His kingdom not only reaches the full length of the "fertile crescent," but covers the whole length of the globe. Throughout the world, Jesus is bringing his spiritual kingdom through the ministry of the gospel in the word of God. People from every tribe, tongue, and nation are willingly submitting to his saving power and rule. Like David, he rules as king. Only now he brings a message of salvation to the nations. Like David, he will take enemy soldiers of darkness and translate them into the kingdom of light. Through his death, he will reconcile his enemies to himself through the blood of his cross.

We are among that number. Although we do have the earthly treasures of silver and gold to bring to him as tribute, we offer him our hearts and lives. By the Spirit, we present our bodies to him as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. We not only confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, but we offer our hearts in sincere devotion and obedience to him. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Every knee will bow to him, whether in heaven, on earth, or under the earth. Let us willingly join their number by offering ourselves to him in loving service this very day.

9

Chapter 9

#9 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 9:1-13

David's actions and attitude towards Saul were nothing short of extraordinary. Saul sought to curse him but David prayed for his blessing. Saul gave David evil, but David returned evil with good. His heart was so sensitive to his obligations to honor God's anointed that he grieved the fact that he had cut off the corner of his robe. David wanted to prove that he wanted no harm to come to Saul. What better proof than to spare the life of the one that vengefully seeks your death! Yet David mourned the humiliation he had occasioned Saul in his deed. His conscience was highly attuned to his obligations before God as well as the evil that lurked within his own heart. He took the speck out of his own eye before taking issue with the log in the eye of his brother. He was more concerned with his own sin than with Saul's. He was more affected by how his innocent actions could become simply the occasion for sin than by Saul's blatantly depraved actions. Such an attitude is only the product of a mind and heart highly sanctified by the Holy

Spirit. David makes the rest of us look like infants in doing good.

Years have passed since the fall of Saul. Most of us would regard David as having gone far above and beyond the call of duty. Having long fulfilled his Christian duty to Saul and his house, his conscience could be at peace.

In 2 Samuel 9:1, we read an amazing statement. David inquires and asks: "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him the kindness of Jonathan's sake." This is repeated in 9:3. David actively initiates an inquiry as to the whereabouts of any remaining members of Saul's house. His grief over its tragic fall still affects his heart. His love for Jonathan is a living memory that is at the forefront of his mind. David's heart is filled with love for the house of his adversary. He did not rejoice when his enemy fell but grieved lest he, too, come to ruin. Reflecting God in Christ (his greater Son) he loved his enemies.

To love one's enemy is truly the most difficult part of the Christian life. To be sure, it is impossible by human strength. But nothing is impossible with God! So God in Christ loved us when we were his enemies. He did not do so begrudgingly but willingly. Indeed, he actively sought us to become objects of his love when we were justly considered children of wrath. What amazing love this is! God not only shows love to his enemies, but he actively seeks them out so that he might reconcile them to himself through the sacrifice of his only-begotten Son. He does this without any lingering bitterness (as we often do) that has done all the work while we have done nothing. Indeed, he

delights to forgive and show mercy.

In this we see the truth of the Biblical phrase “Love is from God” (1 John 4:7). This kind of love finds its origin only in God. David is a man after God’s own heart. He is so filled with God’s love that it spills over onto others around him. We are naturally filled not with love but with jealousy, vengeance, anger, and envy. This was manifested as in a mirror throughout Saul’s life. David’s heart was no different except for the mercy and grace of God.

But we also see the unworthiness of the objects of God’s love through Mephibosheth. He was introduced to us back in 2 Samuel 4:4. He was dropped by his mother while fleeing after the fall of Jonathan and Saul. The fall was significant enough to break or severely injure his legs so that he had become lame.

As such, Mephibosheth had nothing to offer the king in terms of obedience, service, or earthly value. He is a perfect picture of our unworthiness before God. We are simply empty vessels in need of help and grace. We are in desperate need of God, but he does not need us. Moreover, as a member of the house of Saul, it would arguably have been just for David to exclude him since God had rejected his house from the kingdom. God calls us to live in grace with each other, but that does not mean we have any claim to deserve it. If that were the case, grace would no longer be grace! When we come to God we are spiritually crippled and lame. Indeed, more than that we are dead and lifeless. We come to God with nothing to offer except the sin from which we need to be redeemed.

Indeed, in his words before David we see the attitude that each of us must have before Christ, David's greater son: "Behold, I am your servant" (2 Sam. 9:6). "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?" (9:8). Although he deserves nothing, in grace he is granted a place at the king's table. No longer considered a dead dog, he is a living son of the king. His sons after him would also share in this blessing, always eating at the king's table.

In the fullness of time, these images would reappear yet more powerfully in the Syrophonecian woman. Jesus shocks us as readers when he refers to her as a "dog" when she requests that he heal her daughter: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). But the woman does not stumble over her lowly designation. She recognizes her sin and knows she is unworthy of being considered a child of God. She catches that Jesus's statement includes an implied offer for healing at his hand. The children are to be fed "first," implying that what is left will be fed to the dogs. She leaps at the crack in the door of the kingdom and embraces humiliation that she might enter by faith: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28).

We are dogs before God—indeed, dead dogs! But even earthly dogs are beloved by their owners. Through the grace of Christ, we enter into the kingdom by embracing this lowly status. Those who humble themselves God will exalt. We do not remain dogs but become his adopted children. We look forward to the day when we will eat at the Master's table, enjoying eternal fellowship at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev.

10:6-9).

10

Chapter 10

#10 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 10:1-19

Men of the world live according to the mindset of the world. There is one rule: the rule of power. Everyone seeks power. No one wants to lose power. All are motivated by the pursuit of power. The rulers of this world live according to this rule.

In this mindset, there is no room for true mercy, grace, or kindness between men. Every act is calculated. Every deed of “mercy” is a manipulation serving a higher end: power. In this world men will humble themselves temporarily, but only when forced—and only so that they can live to pursue power another day.

But David does not act according to the principles of this world. He is a man after God’s own heart. He is kind to his enemies. His greatest end is not power, but the glory of God. David will sacrifice self to pursue this highest end. The world is blind to this kind of God-centered heart. It cannot understand it.

Power is not only the highest end, it is the “grid” through which the actions of others are analyzed and interpreted.

David hears that the king of the Ammonites has died and that his son (Hanun) now reigns in his place. David’s heart is characterized by a principle of covenant loyalty. God’s covenant with David is reciprocal: David loves God and God loves David. David desires to build God a house, and God promises to build the house of David (2 Sam. 7:1-3, 11). His relationship with God is reflected in his dealings with men. Hanun’s father shows loyalty to David, so David desires to show loyalty to Hanun. He sends servants to offer condolences, as is fitting when a fellow human being made in God’s image has lost a loved one. His gesture is sincere and a sign of David’s gratefulness to the house of Hanun.

But Hanun’s princes do not know God’s ways. They are men of the world and live according to the world. They assume that David’s gesture of kindness is really a front for something sinister. They persuade the king to engage in a “preemptive humiliation” of David’s servants by shaving off half their beards and cutting their garments. This sign of disrespect and humiliation sends a clear message to David: we are on to your tricks. There is a new sheriff in town, and he is not so foolish as to think real kindness exists in the world.

Realizing that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites do what those concerned for power would naturally do in such a moment. They hire the Syrians in a defensive alliance against David. When David heard of it he sent Joab and his mighty men to fight them.

Interestingly, in the battle we see the principle of covenant loyalty come to expression in the armies of Israel. Joab and Abisha create a battle plan that embodies this dynamic. If one is overtaken the other will come to help (11). These brothers thus embody the principle of covenant loyalty and courageously obtain a victory over the Ammonites and the Syrians. They were allied, but only through money. Blood is thicker than water even as love creates a stronger bond than wealth. David joins them to bring the final defeat, and they are subjugated before him. They could have coexisted alongside David as loyal friends. Through their own twisted fixation on the pursuit of power, they end up with none. They humiliate David's servants, and David humiliates them in defeat.

God's covenant cuts both ways. Those who honor him he will honor. But those who dishonor him will be brought to open shame. This is true not only for the Ammonites and Syrians— it is true for David himself. In the next chapter, David will sin grievously against God. Although it will only prove to be temporary, David will fall into the grip of the principles of this world. Drunk with his own power, he will take that which does not belong to him. He will be disloyal to those who are loyal to him, arranging the death of Uriah the Hittite in order to take his wife for himself. David will be brought to repentance in bitter tears but will be restored after the discipline of the Lord.

There is only one who perfectly embodied the principle of covenant loyalty: David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was perfectly loyal to his Father. He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. Although he had all power and authority he willingly set it aside, humbling himself in

his incarnation and death. The death he died he died for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous. He now extends the gracious gift of eternal life to all the nations—not just Ammon and Syrian, but the ends of the earth. All will bow the knee to him, willingly or unwillingly. Some will be subjected forcefully in judgment, others willingly for their salvation. Let us then join the happy number of those who have bowed their knee to Christ. The loyalty he asks of us is to acknowledge our need of him. The obedience he desires is that which flows from a trustful faith in his power and mercy. When we thus honor him he will bestow honor on us—and that eternally!

11

Chapter 11

#11 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 11:1-19

Up to this point, David's life has been characterized by an extraordinary godliness. His conscience is finely attuned not only to basic moral obligations but also to the particular duties through which we manifest true faith in God. For example, we are obligated to love our family members. This is good and right. But if we only love our children and those who love us, we are no different than pagans. When we love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, forgive the sins of others, and rejoice in trial we show that our faith is truly in God and our hope in the kingdom of heaven (see Luke 7:27-42).

David has manifested these qualities in exemplary measure. He repaid evil with good, prayed for his enemies, and even mourned when they fell. Even in the previous chapter, we see a continuation of this exceptional level of godliness uncomprehended and unknown by sinful man.

Yet here in 2 Samuel 11, we see David come crashing down from the heights of sanctified obedience. Christ-like David has become quite like his former enemies Saul and Abner—abusing power, satisfying sinful lusts, and betraying those loyal to him. The tables are turned and the positions are reversed. David was loyal to Saul, and Saul sought his death. Uriah is loyal to David, but David arranges his murder. David has become a dark shadow of his former self. He has become what he hated. He is a mirror of darkness reflecting his former foes, not the principles of the kingdom of God.

Previously David manifested a consistent fulfillment of the most difficult Christian obligations (i.e. love of one's enemy, repaying evil with good). Now he blatantly violates in outward actions two of the most basic moral principles in the Ten Commandments: do not murder and do not commit adultery. We could add to these a violation of the fifth commandment through an abuse of his power as king. The mighty have fallen!

The chapter begins with David at home in his house enjoying the earthly benefits of being at peace with his surrounding enemies. This peace is a blessing from God, but it is not the final rest that was promised to him. So today we enjoy a foretaste of God's rest through the Spirit but simultaneously remain at war with the forces of evil all around us. When we take spiritual rest to recover from our battles, we keep our sword close and hand.

So it was even at the apex of David's kingdom. The kingdom that had been obtained must be maintained through battle. David sends Joab and Israel out to fight, but he remains at the

royal house in Jerusalem. David's sin thus finds its deeper root in his failure to recognize the militant character of his life as a Christian in the world. As long as we are in the flesh, we must be prepared for spiritual war.

One day David is walking on the roof of the king's house and is captivated by a beautiful woman named Bathsheba. David sends and inquires about her, learning that she is married to Uriah. He would have been personally known to David as he is later listed among the "David's Mighty Men" in 2 Samuel 23:39. Uriah's loyal service to David was known to the king, even as it would be manifest in his refusal to (even unwittingly) participate in David's attempted cover-up. Uriah reflects David's former character. David quickly forgets his previous plights and treats Uriah the way Saul treated him!

David's sin takes place quickly. He sees, inquires about, and then calls for Bathsheba. She comes to him and he lies with her. The narrative speed at which the sin occurs emphasizes the total lack of restraint and wrestling of conscience on the part of David (and Bathsheba). Like Adam and Eve in the garden, they quickly see, desire, and then take what is not theirs.

A question can be raised about Bathsheba's culpability in the whole situation. To be sure, David is a man as well as the king and has a higher level of responsibility. But Bathsheba offers no protest. The only communication she offers is to tell David that she is pregnant. Bathsheba was also purifying herself from her ritual uncleanness, which seems to imply that there was an extra level of protection against this temptation. In addition to the moral prohibition against adultery, there was also the

ceremonial requirement for a man and woman to abstain from sexual relations during the time of impurity. Bathsheba is a willing participant in the whole affair.

After hearing the news of her pregnancy, David begins to plot a cover-up. Just as Adam and Eve made coverings with leaves in a poor attempt to hide their sin and shame, so David seeks to cover his transgression. His plot seems shrewd. He calls Uriah the Hittite from the battle lines and commands him to return to his house. But Uriah instead sleeps at the door of the king's house among the servants of David. He prods him again, knowing that his cover-up depends upon his return to his wife within his home. Uriah's response reveals his David-like integrity. Joab and the servants of David are lying in an open field. How can he enjoy the comforts of house and home while his brothers go without? He shows loyal solidarity with them and refuses to enjoy these blessings. Even after David attempts to disinhibit his judgment through drunkenness Uriah still refuses to go to his house. How can he enjoy the fruits of peace when his comrades are still at war? Uriah reflects the former character of his king, even as the king mirrors the kingdom of darkness.

But note especially the deeper motivation for Uriah's refusal to go down to his house. It is not only that Joab and his fellow soldiers lie in an open field. By itself, this would simply be a man-centered motivation. Instead, his focus is God-centered: "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths" (2 Sam. 11:11). The Ark represented God's presence. God dwelt with his people according to their circumstances. When they wandered, he wandered with them. In all their afflictions he was afflicted. If

God himself condescends to the miserable circumstances of his people, should not also we?

What makes this all the more amazing is that Uriah is a Gentile Hittite. The Israelite king walks in the lust of the Gentiles who do not know God, while the “godless” Gentile reflects the loyalty and love of the God of Israel.

David’s shrewd cover-up has failed. Desperate to hide his sin and avoid the consequences, he hatches another plot. In this, he uses Uriah’s loyal bravery against him to bring about his demise. He tells Joab to send him to the front lines of battle and then withdraw and allow him to be struck down. David doesn’t even try to hide his intentions from Joab, and Joab willingly acquiesces in his request. Joab also concocts his own plot to cover for himself if David becomes angry at a failure in battle (2 Sam. 11:21). No one is concerned about their sin. They only want to avoid the consequences.

Ironically, David’s response to the news of Uriah’s death continues the pattern of a cover-up. Knowing full well that he arranged for his death and is guilty of murder, he simply chalks the matter up to that which is natural and random. Joab is to be told: “Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another” (2 Sam. 11:25). He who grieved the fall of his enemy now expressed no grief or remorse at the fall of his friend.

The plot worked perfectly. David satisfied his sinful desire and did what was needed to avoid the consequences. Bathsheba is now his wife. Only a handful know the deed, and there is very

little likelihood they will speak of it in the future. No man will know.

But God is not a man. He sees all. He has been watching the entire time as David has added sin to sin. And the thing that David had done displeased the Lord (2 Sam. 11:27).

This passage is a stark reminder that even the most sanctified among us are still subject to the temptations of the flesh. Indeed, if even David (whose heart was closely aligned with God's) could fall so grievously, how much more weaker saints like us!

David will suffer for his sins. He will come under God's fatherly discipline according to his covenant promise, but his steadfast love will not depart from him (2 Sam. 7:14).

There is no difference. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Both Saul and David have the same flesh within their hearts. The seeds of sin lie deep within each. What made the difference between the two? It was only God's gracious choice and the sending of his Spirit. Without God's grace we would all be left to the fruits of our sins.

Thanks be to God for the grace of Christ. He never slumbered during the days of his earthly battles. He kept watch day and night and defeated the tempter. By ourselves, we can do nothing. But by his grace, we can overcome the tempter's power. Let us remember and take heed of David's fall. Through one sin committed in a few moments the fruit of a lifetime of patience and service to God was compromised. We have seen this story repeated in the tragic fall of Christian leaders who succumb to

temptation. Rather than quickly coming clean, they go to great extents to cover up their transgression and only make a terrible situation even worse. By God's grace, even those who have committed the most heinous sins can be restored through true repentance. But often the earthly damage is done and cannot be fixed short of God's final restoration in the kingdom fo heaven.

"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 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's he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.' (1 Cor. 10:12-13)

12

Chapter 12

#12 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 12:1-31

“When he commits iniquity, I will discipline with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you” (2 Sam. 7:14-15).

What makes the difference between those who are saved and those who are not? Some would argue that the difference lies in the choice of their “free will.” In this view, everybody has a chance to be saved, provided they don’t resist the grace of God offered to them in the Gospel. The problem with this view (among many) is that it makes man the deciding factor in who is saved and who is not. God casts one vote for you and Satan casts one vote against you. You get to cast the deciding vote.

This is not the view of the Bible. The problem is that when left to ourselves man will always vote with Satan. We are naturally corrupt and depraved. The only difference between those who

are saved and those who are condemned is that God chose to be gracious to some and justly withheld it from others.

There is no fundamental difference between the saved and the damned in their natural condition. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It is God's grace that is the deciding factor. Salvation is rooted in the will of God not the will of man.

This principle is on grand display at this era in the life of David. Up to this point, David's conduct and character have stood in stark contrast to Saul's. In this, he demonstrated the fruits of true faith and love for God. Now things take a radical turn. The man after God's own heart begins to manifest the heart of Saul and his allies. Instead of seeking the glory of God, he seeks the glory and pleasure of man. His fall into the pit of depravity is quick and sudden. In short order, he is not only failing to love his enemies but committing some of the heinous sins imaginable in murder and adultery. By himself, he is no different from Saul. Saul's sins are arguably less than David's. Saul plotted David's death but never actually did the evil deed. David actually killed a loyal servant. Saul was open and honest about his desire to kill David. David plots in secret and attempts a clever cover-up.

In these respects, there is no difference between Saul and David. Both have sinned. Both are unworthy of the kingship. But by God's grace, the kingdom will not depart from David as it did from Saul. In grace, God's steadfast love abides with him.

God brought Saul a prophetic word of irrevocable judgment

through the prophet Samuel. In this chapter, God graciously brings a prophetic word of repentance to David through the prophet Nathan. We have seen Nathan before. He was there with David when received the covenant promise of God about his kingdom in 2 Samuel 7.

The word of God comes through him again to David. It is a word of correction and rebuke. It is a word that brings temporary pain and agony in the conviction of sin, but lasting joy in the forgiveness of his sin.

The prophetic word comes to him in the form of a parable. We have seen this earlier in redemptive history. In Judges 9 Jothan told a parable to warn Israel against their desire for a king. Later the prophets will utilize parables in their prophetic messages to the nation. In the fullness of times Jesus will speak in parables, revealing the mystery of the kingdom of God to his people while hiding it from those who are not given eyes to see.

In this context, the parable serves to create distance between David himself and the sins he has committed. We can easily see the sins of others. We have a much harder time seeing our own. Other people's faces are clear to us: we look directly at them. We can see every symmetry and beauty, but also every flaw. We cannot look upon our own faces unless we can see ourselves in a mirror. Even then we choose the best possible lighting. If we have a smartphone with digital editing, we can even filter out our flaws when presenting ourselves digitally to the world.

The word of God comes in parabolic form as a hidden mirror

to David. His moral corruption is put on full display, but it is projected onto others to help David see it more clearly. Upon hearing the parable, David is incensed and calls down judgment against him with an oath: "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (12:6). David rightly (albeit unwittingly) acknowledges both the guilt and the heinousness of his sin. It was committed in strength, not weakness. It was done high-handedly with coldness of heart to the damage it caused to others. It was a sin that was worthy of death. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life.

Nathan then turns the tables on David and strikes him in the heart with a stinging rebuke: "You are the man!" At this moment he realizes the parable is about him. God opens his eyes to see the hidden meaning of the prophetic message, and he is overwhelmed with guilt and shame. God's chastisements are pronounced upon him. That which he sought to cover up will be brought out into the public for his open shame. Evil will be raised up against his house. His wives will be violated by his neighbor for all to see. He sought to keep his sin secret, God will bring it out for all to see. The sword will not depart from David's house. The conflict he experienced for so long against his earthly enemies will now be manifested in his own house.

The words sting, but have a gracious effect. David confesses his sin: "I have sinned against the Lord." In this confession God grants forgiveness: "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die." But violence, death, and corruption will be visited on David's house.

The child within Bathsheba will die. Even though this has been declared to him, he fasts and prays in repentance before God. As long as the child is alive, he avails himself of the means to ask God for salvation. He only ceases when the child passes. So we pray for the salvation of others up to the point of death. After that their fate is sealed.

But God's word of judgment will not be his last. In the place of the child who died another will come in his place. After death, God will bring life. The child's name is Solomon, meaning "peace." David's house will be visited with conflict and war, but afterward peace will come! This is prefigured in David's victory over Rabah at the end of the chapter. God's discipline has been pronounced to bring about his repentance. But God's steadfast love remains with him. It will be manifested in greater ways through a son of peace to be born to him. He will be the object of God's gracious love, and through him, the promise of his love will be preserved.

It is not without significance that this episode with David and Bathsheba is referenced in Matthew's genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:6). Of all the great acts of David the one highlighted in the lineage of the Savior is the great sin he committed with Bathsheba and Uriah. In fact, the whole genealogy is sprinkled with reminders that the people whom Jesus came to save are sinners redeemed by God's grace. Judah's sin with Tamar is noted, as is Rahab the redeemed prostitute (1:3, 5).

It is no wonder when Matthew tells the story of the birth of the Son of David it is accompanied with this message from the angel: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your

wife...She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (1:21).

This is our salvation. The only thing we have to present to God is sin from which we need salvation. Jesus is the son of David who alone can bring us this blessing. It is our most desperate need, and there is only one to whom we can turn. Even the greatest among men are sinners worthy of death. Jesus is the only perfectly righteous king. His is the only name under heaven given among men by which we may be saved.

13

Chapter 13

#13 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 13:1-39

Prior to David's sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, he had largely functioned as a positive type and shadow of Jesus Christ. Through his conduct, experiences, and office as king, he foreshadowed and prefigured the obedience, sufferings, and person of Jesus Christ. The pattern of Christ was reflected in the life of David. He was a man after God's own heart and demonstrated that in his faith and godliness.

Every type has this "positive" aspect, but it also carries within it a "negative" shortcoming. They are "shadows" of greater things to come, but are not the final reality. In the brightness of day, a person's shadow reflects their outline and pattern on the ground. When we see the shadow, we see a trace of the person. But the shadow is not the reality. For example, the animal sacrifices pictured Christ's moral perfection and his sacrificial death. The animal was to be a year old, without spot or blemish, and its blood was to be shed for forgiveness. But

the blood of bulls and goats were but a shadow of the blood of Christ. In themselves they could never take away sins. David's fall is a reminder that while he reflects the life and word of his Son, he is still an imperfect shadow. We are to put our hope in one to come.

This imperfection is placed on full display in the aftermath of his sin with Bathsheba. God had declared a word of disciplinary judgment against him. What he had done in secret will be publicly laid bare. The evil that lay hidden in his sanctified heart—which he sought to cover up—will be laid open for all to see.

The chapter begins with the figure of Absalom. He was the third son born to David at Hebron to Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:23). The Geshurites lived on the east side of the Promised Land, and were not fully driven out in the days of the conquest (Josh. 13:13). Just as David's moral imperfections are on display, so Absalom's Geshurite mother is a reminder of Israel's past failures. Absalom has a mixed lineage even as David has a mixed spiritual nature. Absalom's sister is Tamar, who is known for her exceptional beauty. Her central role in this narrative is obvious.

Next is the character Amnon. He was born to Ahinoam of Jezreel. Jezreel was part of the inheritance of Judah (Josh. 15:55). Although he has a purer external lineage, he proves himself to be a child of the evil one rather than a true son of Abraham.

The details of the passage evoke a strong response of disgust

from to us as readers. Adultery is a grievous sin. Rape and incest are yet more heinous. The premeditated and deceptive manner by which Amnon seeks to seduce her is simply revolting. His self-deception reveals that he is fully under the sway of evil. He speaks as if he is sick with love when he is actually ill with lust. When his sister refuses him, she rightly notes that this act would make him one of the “outrageous fools” in Israel (2 Sam. 13:13). Ignoring her warning he overpowers her and violates her. Adding insult to injury, his sinful affection turns into intense hatred such that “the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her” (2 Sam. 13:14).

What is happening in this passage? David had the seeds of sin lying dormant in his heart. They came out into the open with Bathsheba and Uriah. Now these seeds fully grow and are put on full display in Amnon. The true nature of human evil is being laid bare for all to see. Lust for sexual pleasure and power bears ugly fruit in rape, anger, and hatred. The seeds of these sins lie in the heart of the most sanctified among us (i.e. David). How much more ought we lesser saints to take heed and know the power of evil that lies dormant within us?

David added murder to his sin of adultery by arranging for the death of Uriah in an effort to cover his sin and avoid its consequences. Whereas his lust was on display in his son Amnon, murder is manifested in Absalom, Tamar’s brother. Like David, he crafts a careful plot so that the circumstances are just right. When Amnon’s heart is “merry with wine” the wine press of his wrath will be unleashed against him. He commands his servants to strike Amnon dead when the moment comes,

and they do as he commands. When news reaches David, at first it seems as if all the king's sons have been killed. Jonadab corrects the record, noting that only Amnon has been killed and that this was a plot of Absalom from the day he violated his sister. The patterns of evil seen earlier in the narrative reappear: conspiracy, vengeance, and murder. That which David did in secret is laid bare in public for all to see.

Things will only get worse from here. Absalom's conspiracy to kill his brother will grow into a conspiracy to seize the throne for himself. Murder and bloodshed will accompany the whole ordeal until finally Absalom is killed by Joab.

God's future kingdom was reflected in David. But God's kingdom had not yet fully come. David's sanctified heart is still infected by the disease of sin. We cannot put our confidence in princes. Even the greatest of earthly saints is not a sure hope of salvation. Our only hope is in Jesus, who can purify our sinful hearts and wash them in his blood. There is no lust, sinful vengeance, or murderous rage in him. The seeds of these sins lie dormant in each of us. But he purifies his holy bride through his word and sacrificial love. Our hope is only in him.

14

Chapter 14

#14 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 14:1-39

“We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast” (2 Samuel 14:14).

Earlier in the narrative Nathan the prophet came to David to speak the word of God. He did so in the form of a parable. This created a narrative distance between David personally and the sinful actions he had committed. His sin was projected onto someone else. One of the “catch-22s” of being a sinner is that we are blinded to our own sin. Our eyes are positioned in our heads to look “out there” at other people. We can look at our bodies, hands, and feet. But without a mirror, we cannot see our faces. The parable served as a mirror for David. It was truly effective in revealing his sinful blemishes. When he saw the filth on his face, he ran to God to wash it off.

Something similar happens in 2 Samuel 14. The difference here is that it is not the LORD who sends Nathan the Prophet, but Joab who sends a wise woman to speak to the king. This woman is ordered to strategically deceive David. She is to pretend to be a mourner and speak to the king about a dilemma in her family regarding her two sons. Her husband is dead, and one son has murdered the others. The guilty son is also to be put to death. Justice, in a way, demands this. But mercy recognizes that this will only leave her destitute. The avenger of blood executes justice and distributes punishment. It can only kill—it cannot heal. It brings death, but cannot give life.

David sees the problem and immediately orders that her remaining son should be kept alive. When Nathan spoke to David regarding Bathsheba, this was the point where he turned the tables on David and declared: “Thou art the man!” This woman is not a prophet but has the gift of wisdom from God. She speaks without an authoritative office as a servant of the king, but her words are as pointed as appropriate for her station: “Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home” (14:13).

We must pause at this point to note a few things about this messenger to David. This is a reminder that in addition to the special offices of prophet, priest, and king (or deacon, elder, and pastor) there is also the general office of Christian. Every believer receives this office when they are united with Christ and receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Part of this general office is the privilege and duty of confessing the name of Christ

and speaking his word and his wisdom. This, however, does not extinguish the distinction between the general and special offices or the order God has established between them.

Moreover, this office is shared by both men and women. Both are able to speak God's word and offer wisdom in ways appropriate to those whom they speak. The general office grants a place for her to speak to those in authority, but not in a way that cancels out the nature of her relationship with them. The woman exemplifies these principles. She does not presume to speak to the king of her own accord but is sent by a lesser authority (i.e. Joab). When she addresses the king, she does so respectfully, regularly honoring David's station, office, and gifts. She shares wisdom with him as one sent by another. She notes the emotionally painful nature of the situation she describes, but does not use her emotions and hurts as a weapon to manipulate. She reflects the wisdom and humility of Abigail. Truth is communicated, but not in a way that disrupts the order God has established.

Ironically, her exemplary manner of speech is wedded to a strategic deception instigated by Joab. However, this deception is not intended for David's harm, but for his good. Joab seems to have anticipated that David would discern his arrangement with the woman (David is, after all, like an angel of God in discerning good from evil). David discerns Joab's purpose for his good, and does not punish her or him for their "deception." Indeed, Nathan the prophet spoke similarly in a parable to him for his good. Perhaps he similarly discerns the providential purpose of God in sending him this wise woman.

What is the purpose of this? God had declared judgment upon David's house. What he did in secret would be laid bare in public. Absalom is the one through whom these things will come. David's "love" for Absalom blinds him to the obvious reality of his sin and destructive conduct. This puts the nation in danger. It also sets up a situation in which life can be preserved and the effects of sin mitigated. As the woman declared to David: "We must all die, we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast" (14:14).

Absalom has killed Amnon. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Justice demands eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and life for life. If justice is left to work itself out, it will bring nothing by blood and death.

The king tells Joab to bring Absalom to Jerusalem. He brings him back to the city, but for two years does not come into the king's presence. This arrangement will preserve life for a time, but it cannot change the heart of Absalom. The subsequent narrative will reveal the depths of sin that lie within his heart. His charismatic appearance and personality will make him effective in conspiring a rebellion against his own father, which will end in his death.

God's judgment will come upon David's house even as the Lord had declared to him. But the word of judgment would not be God's last. Sin deserves death. The soul that sins must die. Justice must be satisfied. But God's greatest delight is not in judgment, but in grace. In David's love for his sinful son, we

see an imperfect reflection of the love of Christ for his sinful children. In the greatness of this love, he would offer himself as a substitute to satisfy the demands of justice so that grace and mercy could abound to sinners.

This message is proclaimed to us in the Gospel proclaimed most fully through the apostles. It is worth noting that when Paul addresses this point in his letter to the Romans he begins by addressing the rank depravity among the Gentiles. Any Jewish reader of Romans 1 would likely only declare a loud “amen” to Paul’s denunciation of these Gentile evils. But like Nathan and the wise woman, he quickly shifts to his own “Thou art the man” moment in Romans 2. The depravity of the Gentiles is also in the Jews. Judging others will not save, and neither will the mere possession of the revelation of the law. Both Jews and Greeks lie under the sway of sin. Only a perfect righteousness from God will bring forgiveness. Only Christ can save their souls from death.

This is our greatest dilemma. As the wise woman declared, we are all like water spilled on the ground. We all must die. When death and judgment take us, justice does not have the power to gather us up again. Christ satisfied justice. He paid for sin. Through the power of the Spirit, he is able to lay down his life and take it up again. In Christ, God does not take away life, but gives it freely—and that eternally!

15

Chapter 15

#15 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 15:1-37

The first part of David's adult life is a clear foreshadowing of the humiliation and suffering of Christ. David is a type of his greater Son. Before he assumed the exalted glory of the kingship he had to endure shame and humiliation. Having patiently endured he received the crown of victory. So also Christ's earthly humiliation is followed by his heavenly exaltation.

However, in his sin with Bathsheba David enters again into a season of suffering and chastisement. In one respect this is the discipline of the Lord for his good. In another respect, it is a reminder that Israel's messianic king will be a suffering servant. Like David, Jesus will suffer for sin. The difference is that while David suffers for his own transgressions Jesus will bear the sin of others. With this distinction in view, we must appreciate how the story of Absalom's betrayal of David foreshadows a central suffering of Christ, namely, his betrayal

by Judas Iscariot.

The previous chapter noted Absalom's charismatic personality and appearance. He is physically flawless from head to toe. Even his hair is stunning. His children are also exceptionally beautiful (see 2 Sam. 14:25-27). Physical beauty is the fruit of God's creative wisdom and skill. It is not inherently evil. In its proper sphere, it can rightly be celebrated. But in a world of corruption and sin it can easily become utilized for evil purposes. Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised (see Prov. 31:10). Recall that one of the themes of this book is precisely this point. The prophet Samuel said of Saul: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

The fact that David's physically impressive son becomes the conduit of further suffering is drenched with irony. His enemy Saul was also physically impressive but proved to have a heart opposed to God. Now his own son follows the pattern of his former enemy. The themes of his earlier life reappear with the tables now turned on David.

Absalom uses his charm, charisma, and proximity to the king to hatch a plot to assume the throne. To gain a following for himself, he gathers to himself all those who have an unresolved grievance that is not being addressed by the king and his court. Absalom has no real concern for justice and righteousness. Like manipulators of all ages, they seize on the unhappiness

of the people simply to gather a following and gain power for themselves. He positions himself as the advocate for the “common man” over against the “elites” in power. The truth is that he simply wants power for himself and cares nothing for the nation or the people.

Note the parallel to Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus. He appealed to the care of the poor as a pretext for his opposition to Jesus’s anointing: “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:5). As with Absalom, so with Judas Iscariot. They hide their wickedness under the guise of justice and righteousness. Absalom’s four year effort in this regard won him the hearts of the men of Israel (15:6-7).

When the time was right, Absalom maneuvered again. Like before he executed his evil plot under the shroud of righteousness. Absalom asked the king for permission to worship the LORD in Hebron where he had made a vow. However, his intention is not to sacrifice to the LORD, but to sacrifice his own father to seize the throne of Israel. Absalom sends secret messengers throughout Israel who will proclaim him king in Hebron. The fact that he has no legal claim to the throne while David is alive is not important. He has won the hearts of the people. If they follow him, David’s kingdom is as good as dead.

David receives word of Absalom’s plot. Instead of doing what must be done to quell the rebellion, he decides to flee Jerusalem. The mighty, brave warrior who slew the giant now runs like

a coward from his own son. He who defeated great enemies with a small band of mighty men when living as a fugitive now flees his established throne even when the armies of Israel are at his command. Numerous servants and soldiers remain loyal to him. This is highlighted several times in the passage (15:15, 21). Both Israelite and foreigner alike are ready to stand with David in life or death. Yet David still flees in fear. Even with the Ark of God before him, he is still determined to leave the city.

As he flees, note the location of David as he leaves and weeps. He is at the Mount of Olives. This was a crucial location in the life of Jesus in his sufferings. In Luke 22:39 we read of Jesus going up to the Mount of Olives with his disciples. On this occasion he specifically prays for God to (if possible) remove the cup of suffering from him. Immediately after this, he is betrayed by Judas in this exact location (22:47). As it was with David, so it is with Jesus!

But there is a difference. David comes to the Mount of Olives fleeing in fear. Jesus comes wrestling with God's will, but in prayerful faith embraces the will of God—even when it calls him to suffering and death.

Betrayal is a bitter experience. Part of our Christian calling is to pour ourselves out in love and service for others. Often we will not get the recognition or appreciation we might expect. Other times we will be repaid good for evil. Jesus tells us that those closest to us will be the ones who turn against us (Matt. 10:34-49). As with David, one's enemies will become the members of their own household. In such moments we face a great test: will we love Christ more than we despise the misery of our

sufferings? The kingdom that we await is in heaven. There we have a friend who is always faithful and will never leave us or forsake us. Do we value his friendship so much more than our human relationships that we would be willing to trade everything we have on earth for what is reserved for us in heaven? The reality is that we will eventually lose all earthly things, including those whom we love. What is reserved for us in heaven can never be taken away.

16

Chapter 16

#16 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 16:1-23

The fruits of David's sin are being visited upon his house. What he nurtured in secret is being exposed in public: lust, adultery, conspiracy, and murder. David was a man after God's own heart, but the fullness of sinful flesh lay close at hand within him. This internal (secret) sin of David is being displayed outwardly in his son, Absalom. He is openly committing rape, engaging in a national conspiracy to overthrow David, and is willing to shed the blood of many to achieve his evil ends. In Absalom, David sees as in a mirror the enemy within himself.

2 Samuel 16 continues this tragic story. Things appear to go from bad to worse.

First, we read of a bad report from Ziba to King David. Ziba is the servant of Mephibosheth—the son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul. The kindness David showed to Mephibosheth now appears to be returned with evil. He brings donkeys,

bread, raisins, fruit, and wine. These are the fruits of God's blessing as manifested in the land of promise. But behind the material "blessing" stands an apparent curse. Ziba claims to be bringing these gifts to help David. But when David inquires as to the whereabouts of Mephibosheth he hears a terrible report. According to Ziba, his master is at Jerusalem eagerly awaiting the return of his father's kingdom after the fall of David. David accepts the news. All that was Mephibosheth's is transferred to Ziba.

David does not yet know that Ziba is lying. This will all be revealed in 2 Samuel 19:26-27. For now, it appears that David's situation is going from bad to worse. Time is moving backward. He had previously passed from trial to triumph. Now he experiences anew his former sufferings. He had shown mercy to Mephibosheth. David repaid evil for good, and now David is repaid good with evil.

But this scene is significant in another respect. David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah involved sinful deception on his part in the attempted cover-up. He fell into a pattern of lies and conspiracy to achieve the gratification of his sinful desires. Now he is on the receiving end of these sins at the hands of others. In Ziba, he sees himself as in a mirror. What is hidden in the darkness of his heart is brought out into the light.

Next comes a similar scene with Shimei. Ziba's "curse" of David is hidden in the shroud of "blessing." Shimei's curse is out in the open. The call of the Christian is to patiently endure proclamations of curse. When others curse us we bless them. Cursing another is a sin. Shimei will confess his sin later in the

narrative (2 Sam. 19:20). Like Mephibosheth, Shimei is from the house of Saul. His communication of curse is done with a malicious motive. He observes all the evil that is currently befalling David and attributes it to the execution of the Lord's vengeance for the house of Saul.

Nothing could be further from the truth. God is not executing vengeance against David. Nor is the kingdom being taken from him. David has repented and his sin has been put away. Even though the "shell" of his statements is false, there is a kernel of truth in them. He is a man of blood—only with Uriah, not Saul. David has sinned. The evil befalling him is for his chastisement and discipline. God's purpose in it is restorative, not punitive.

David accepts this as if in the hand of God. When Abishai wishes to take off his head, David stays his hand. He has not forgotten the wisdom of Abigail and the fact that God himself will deal with the enemies of his anointed. David thus renews his former faith in God while patiently enduring evil. He accepts the words of Shimei as the chastisement from God, even though the vessel is flawed.

It's worth pausing at this point to see how instructive David's example is for us. Remember that the Bible's use of "examples" is different from the world's. David is an example for us in his union with Christ. The point of contact between David and us is not the raw power of our wills to mimic his good behavior. We share a common union with Christ in which we receive the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the only source of power by which we might live a sanctified life.

But is it not amazing how David does the exact opposite of what most of us are tempted to do in these situations? Instead of finding the kernel of truth in malicious statements and using them as an occasion for humility, we seize upon even the smallest imperfection as an excuse to completely disregard it. We do this even when the imperfections are relatively small. To be sure, we have responsibilities to communicate in a godly way, with patience and self-control. If we have faith in God, we can also patiently endure poorly worded and even malicious statements against us. God can bring good out of evil. We need to trust his purposes more than we are preoccupied with the purposes of man.

The chapter concludes with the entrance of Absalom into Jerusalem. The scene brings to apparent fruition what he has heard from Ziba and Shimei. David's friend Hushai betrays him, aligning himself with Absalom (16:15-19). Even Absalom notes the betrayal! Ahithophel also advises Absalom to lie with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. He whose opinion was considered to be like the word of God instead gives a word of the devil. David's secret sins are now openly on display through Absalom: sexual immorality, conspiracy, and death. David betrayed the Lord, and now he is betrayed by both family and friends.

David endures all these things for his sin. He is a type of Christ, but also an imperfect vessel of grace. What happens to him for his discipline and chastisement is experienced by Jesus in the vicarious accomplishment of our redemption. Like David, he was betrayed by his friend. His own family also rejected him. His enemies sought his downfall so that they might take

the kingdom from his hand. Jesus was under “discipline”—not for his sins, but for ours. He learned obedience from what he suffered (Heb. 5:8). Through this he was made perfect and became the source of our eternal salvation.

17

Chapter 17

#17 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 17:1-29

David has just about hit rock bottom. He has sinned grievously against the Lord. His son has raped his half-sister and lies with his concubines in the sight of all Israel. In a sinister and premeditated fashion he has conspired against his own father to seize the kingdom of Israel for himself. Those to whom David showed kindness now appear to be cheering his downfall. Former friends betray him to his enemies. It's hard to imagine how things could get much worse. To top it off, David seems powerless and unwilling to do what is needed to stop the rebellion. He who saved others must himself now be saved.

In chapter 17 Ahithophel continues to counsel Absalom in the consolidation of his newfound power. He will take 12,000 men and pursue David. He perceives that the king has reached a low point. David's will to fight is almost non-existent. His remaining followers can easily be thrown into a panic. He will

strike down King David and return with the spoils of his house. The plan seems shrewd. There will be no better opportunity. But it does come with some risks.

To mitigate those risks, Absalom seeks the counsel of another. He calls Hushai the Archite to hear his assessment of the plot. Hushai warns Absalom, reminding him of David's military prowess. Although he seems cornered and weak, these also become the occasions for a revival of strength. He likens David to a bear robbed of her cubs in the field: desperation can lead to invigoration. Instead of a smaller unit led by Ahithophel, Absalom should gather all Israel to himself. Then when he is cornered there will be no escape for him.

Earlier we saw how Ziba lied about Mephibosheth's betrayal. What appeared to be bad news actually obscured a hidden blessing: Mephibosheth remained loyal to David. We see a similar incident here. Hushai's "advice" to Absalom was actually a strategic misdirection to preserve David's life. When he prevails upon Absalom to accept his advice, he immediately sends messengers to warn David. The messengers were almost captured but were rescued with further strategic deception by a woman who hid them in her well and directed their pursuers elsewhere. By God's providential preservation, the messengers tell David of the plot against his throne. He arises with the people who are with him.

With this change, Ahithophel sees the writing on the wall. His counsel was considered as sure as the word of God. Ahithophel also knows how correct his counsel was. David is like a bear cornered without her cubs. There was one way to overthrow

him. All other efforts would end in destruction. Seeing the inevitable conclusion, he returns to his city, sets his affairs in order, and hangs himself. He believes he will meet with the wrath of the king. Ironically, David actually shows mercy to his enemies, pardoning their rebellious sedition.

As David prepares for battle, Shobi, Machir, and Barzilla bring supplies. The soldiers are fed and well-supplied. David has gone from a position of weakness on the brink of destruction to a position of strength.

The battle lines have been drawn. Absalom will be overthrown and the kingdom restored to David. As God had said, David will suffer chastisement for his sin, but God will not completely depart from him.

What is a chastisement for David turns out to be a foreshadowing of the sufferings of his greater Son. Jesus, too, will be betrayed by a close companion. Like Ahithophel, Judas will hang himself when he believes his doom is certain. Jesus, however, will have no faithful friends in his moment of weakness. On the cross, all will leave him and flee. He will die alone. Criminals will be his only companions. Jesus will die. But God raised him from the dead. Exalted into heaven he would receive the throne of his father David, and his kingdom shall have no end.

As members of the kingdom, we will be certain to experience the same things. Brother will betray brother—even unto death (Matt. 10:21-23). Paul, too, had moments where all his companions fled (2 Tim. 4:16). At times we will have to stand

CHAPTER 17

alone for the cause of Christ. Although all may turn against us,
the Lord will remain by our side!

18

Chapter 18

#18 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 18:1-33

David has hit several low points in his life. In the first half of his life, he reached a low point during his sojourning from Saul among the Philistines. In 1 Samuel 30, the Amalekites raided Ziklag (where he was staying) and captured his wives, sons, daughters, and all that he had. The people were so bitter in soul they were ready to stone him as punishment for the disaster. On the precipice of destruction, God intervened to rescue him. David's circumstances had made him weak, but he was strengthened in the Lord his God.

History is repeating itself in 2 Samuel 18. In the previous chapter, David's fate hung in the balance as Absalom weighed the competing advice of Ahithophel and Hushai. Ahithophel had a foolproof plan to bring David to destruction, but Absalom opted to follow the word of Hushai. Unbeknownst to him, Hushai was secretly hatching a plot to warn David and rescue him from his son's hand. In God's providence, David was

forewarned and Absalom's plot was thwarted.

There is a flip side to David's dilemma. On the one hand, he does not wish to have his kingdom taken from him. In this deliverance, he can therefore sincerely rejoice. On the other hand, the conspirator in this plot is his own son whom he loves. Absalom is therefore simultaneously family and foe, and David manifests the conflicting emotions appropriate to such a circumstance.

When David sends out Joab, Abishai, and Ittai over the armies of Israel, he commands them to deal gently with Absalom. During the battle, Absalom rode under an oak tree and caught himself in its thick branches. Recall how the narrator earlier highlights Absalom's striking appearance, including his long, thick hair (1 Sam. 14:25-26). Thick hair can sometimes have curls which often causes hair to be caught in knots. Absalom is therefore caught in his own thicket. There is an obvious irony here. Absalom's striking persona contributed to his rise to power and now becomes the reason for his downfall.

These facts are reported by an unnamed soldier to Joab. Joab is incredulous at the news, exclaiming: "Why then did you not strike him there to the ground?" (18:11). The man gives the obvious answer: the king has clearly commanded them not to harm Absalom. Joab has no time for any of this. In his view, the king's judgment is compromised, blinded by foolish love for a wayward son. Joab understands this world. It works by power and force. Threats must be removed. Joab's worldly wisdom outweighs the will of the king. Taking three javelins into his hand, he thrusts Absalom through his heart and kills him. Ten

more men strike him strike him after this to brutally ensure his expiration. He is cast into a pit in the forest and covered in stones. The threat to David's throne has been removed. The plot has been foiled. David's son is dead.

Ahimaaz asks Absalom if he can bring the news to David. His eagerness is understandable. On the surface, it appears that this is good news that will be welcomed by the king. However, Joab knows David's history in these matters. He does not rejoice in the downfall of his enemies. This was the case with the fall of King Saul, how much more the death of his own Son! Instead, he tells a Cushite (a foreigner) to bring the news to David. However, Ahimaaz outruns the Cushite and makes it there first.

The story of the messengers' arrival is told in a dramatic way. As readers, we know how David will react when he finally hears the news. When Ahimaaz approaches, David recognizes his gait. He is a good man, so David expects good news. Ahimaaz tells him only what he knows he wants to hear: all is well. When David inquires about the fate of his son, Ahimaaz feigns ignorance. The Cushite arrives shortly thereafter, boldly declaring what they both already know: Absalom his son is dead. The Cushite mistakingly believes this will be well-received by the king. To his undoubted surprise David weeps with grief: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

We have noted several times how David is a type of Christ. United with his greater Son, he manifests the future pattern of Christ in his humiliation and exaltation. But David is not the

Christ even as the shadow is not the reality. His foreshadowing of Christ is real but expressed in an imperfect way as an imperfect vessel. For example, David's chastisement for his sin with Bathsheba is clearly discipline for his sin. But it simultaneously foreshadows aspects of the innocent suffering of Jesus Christ.

Here we see a similar imperfect foreshadowing of Christ's love towards his enemies. Parents love their children. It is not uncommon for that love to cause them to foolishly overlook their children's flaws. Even when they are obvious and causing damage to themselves and others, parents will be so blinded that they unwittingly enable them to only increase the speed of their self-destruction. Parents must often take the painful step of allowing their children to experience the (sometimes severe) consequences of their bad behavior. If they don't they only teach their children that they will always be there to bail them out. This does nothing to truly help them. It only satisfies a misplaced sense of emotional guilt and grief over their children's bad circumstances.

It is hard to see how David is not falling into this parental trap to some degree. We are not told the specifics of the cause of his emotional distress. But given the whole incident was set in motion by his own sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, he may place responsibility for Absalom's sin on his own shoulders. Whatever the case, David's love for Absalom causes him to deeply grieve his demise, even though it is clearly rooted in Absalom's own grievous sin.

There are clearly imperfections attached to David's grief. But

do we not in it see a foreshadowing of the love of Christ? Indeed, David even wishes that he could have died in the place of his son. It is not possible for one mere man to substitute his life for another. Even when this desire is expressed in a purer form through figures like Moses and Paul, it remains mere sentiment that cannot be effectuated (Exodus 32:32; Rom. 9:3). What is impossible with man is possible with God.

In the fullness of times, the Son of David would arise, manifesting these principles in their purest form. He would weep over the destruction of his people who rejected him (Luke 19:41-44). He would give his life for his enemies so that they might become reconciled friends. Like David, he would pardon those who had sinned against him. Through his power, these acts of mercy would not lead them to self-destructive enablement. Along with the gift of forgiveness, he would extend the transforming grace of the Holy Spirit to make the willing and ready to live for his glory. In Jesus Christ the grace of God does not become a license to enable evil. It frees us from our bondage to sin that we might become slaves of God and servants to righteousness.

19

Chapter 19

#19 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 19:1-43

The Bible teaches that God is gracious. In Christ, he has shown love to his enemies and forgiven those who have sinned against him. This glorious news is often joyously received by its recipients—and for good reason. The Gospel truly is “good news.” Those justly doomed to eternal prison receive a free pardon from the king. Once doomed to hell they are now destined for heaven.

But there is a flip side to God’s grace when it is manifested in our lives and relationships. When we forgive others, we absorb the hurt their sins have caused us. We die to our instinctual demand for justice. The lawbreaker gets off Scot free. This can be a bitter pill for some to swallow. Recall in the Parable of the Prodigal Son the reaction of the older brother. He had worked hard, sacrificing his time and energy to be faithful to his father. And now this worthless son returns home. He returns and is restored as if he had never left. Grace extended to his

brother seem like unfairness to him. The father seems to love his “enemies” more than he does his “friends.”

A similar principle is embodied in 2 Samuel 19. David’s sin with Bathsheba has led to the near downfall of his kingdom. His own son has conspired against him to seize the throne for himself. Throughout the narrative, David has shown love to his enemies, praying for those who persecute him, and repaying evil with good. In this, he has functioned as a type of Christ in his love for us. But it also has created some awkward moments for his servants and soldiers.

Joab is among these perturbed members of David’s personnel. He boldly rebukes David for “hat[ing] those who love you and lov[ing] those who hate you.” He grieves the death of a son who has committed sin upon sin and had openly conspired to kill him. In one respect, we see in David in David an expression of God’s love for us as his wayward children. But the vessel in which this love is expressed is highly imperfect and imbalanced. Still, his role as a type of Christ is more important than the imperfect ways in which he embodies the patterns of our Lord. This is perhaps why Joab is replaced by Amasa in the very next scene. Joab does not see the greater principles of God’s kingdom at work in the life of David. He functions and lives by the principles of earthly power. The “good” is equated with everything that can be done to obtain and preserve power. Thus he colluded with David in his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. Although there is a hint of wisdom in his rebuke to David, he shares responsibility for the root cause of the trouble afflicting Israel.

More important than the temporal preservation of David's earthly power are the principles of the kingdom of God manifested in his life. Chief among these are Christ's love for his enemies (manifested in David's grief over Absalom), and the pardoning of transgression. The next section of the chapter expresses this principle in David's pardoning of Shimei. He had publicly cursed David, wrongly attributing his misfortune to some wrong he had done to the house of Saul. He was also wrong in that David was not truly under God's curse (only his fatherly chastisement). But he was correct that David had become a man of blood, only in his murder of Uriah the Hittite. There was a hidden truth in the garble of Shimei's lies. David had overlooked the imperfections of his communication and accepted the divine truth embedded within it. The informal disregard of David for Shimei's sin is now ratified in a formal pardon. Abishai is incensed at the move. Shimei should be put to death. Indeed, did not David himself recognize that it would have been a sin for him to curse Saul because he was the Lord's anointed? The sin he avoided for himself he now freely pardons in another.

Next comes Mephibosheth. Ziba had lied about Mephibosheth, claiming that he was awaiting the demise of David so that the kingdom would be returned to him as a surviving member of the house of Saul. The truth finally comes out. Ziba had slandered Mephibosheth. Yet David does not punish Ziba. In fact, he determines to have them both divide the land that had been transferred from the one to the other. Mephibosheth, in keeping with his character, cares nothing for the material things of the kingdom. He delights simply in the return of the king.

Mephibosheth discerns what many of the others do not see. The blessedness of the land and the people lies in the presence of the king himself. Note the contrast between Mephibosheth and the men of Israel. They dispute with the men of Judah as to why they were allowed to bring the king back to Jerusalem. Their concern is more focused on the reward that might accompany the role rather than the mere honor of being in the king's presence. The Christian's delight is first and foremost in their association with King Jesus, not in any blessing they receive from him.

Finally, the text details David's interactions with Barzillai. He was among those who had brought supplies to David when he was at Mahanaim after he had been warned of the impending attack through Hushai (2 Samuel 17:27). In addition to pardoning his enemies, David also remembers to reward his faithful servants. But Barzillai was not looking for an earthly reward. At this point, he was too old to obtain much benefit from it and offered to transfer his reward to another. Like Mephibosheth, his reward is having served the king.

Here we see in David another manifestation of the work and disposition of Jesus Christ, his greater Son. Jesus will show love to his enemies, repay our evil with eternal good, and pardon sin and transgression, even while he suffers patiently while doing good. David and Jesus can do this because they see beyond this temporal world to the eternal things of God. They know that on earth we have no lasting possession, but seek one to come in heaven.

In Christ, we are called to the same life. It is hard and difficult

for our flesh. We are called to give up what we can see and trust in that which we cannot see. Without faith, it is impossible to please God, because whoever would draw near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (see Heb. 11). What is true of the positive aspects of our Christian life is also true of the patience and humility we must express when enduring his fatherly discipline for our sin. One of the hallmarks of a hard heart is to be more focused on the consequences of our sin rather than on the heinousness and evil of the sin itself. We will declare “Woe is me!” because of the pain we experience as a consequence of our sin. But we are number one to the hurt it has caused others and blind to its wickedness and evil before God. We must accept the consequences as God’s just judgment, patiently enduring them as his fatherly discipline that will in time produce a harvest of righteousness.

20

Chapter 20

#20 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 20:1-26

David has endured two seasons of suffering. The first was with King Saul who unjustly sought his life. In this, he was suffering unjustly as a test of his patience and faith. The second was with his son, Absalom who had fomented a rebellion against him. This was God's chastisement for his sin and a test of his true repentance.

Although David's sin was great, God's grace was greater. God had forgiven and put away his transgression with Bathsheba and Uriah. Mirroring his covenant Lord, David also pardons the sins of the rebels (2 Sam. 19:16-23). He knows that for God's grace to be truly received it must also be given to others: forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Through suffering David has entered the glory of his kingdom. But the end has not yet fully come. As long as we are in the world, the principles of the world will manifest themselves. In

chapter 20 we see them raise their ugly head in the rebellion of Sheba of Benjamin. In him, we see a preliminary division of the nation between Judah and the eleven other tribes. This division was hinted at in the dispute between Judah and the other tribes during the return of David to Jerusalem (see 19:41-43). We will later see it come to fuller expression in the divided kingdom in the days of Rehoboam.

Sheba takes a page from Absalom's plot and uses the people's sense of being treated unfairly as a means to gain power for himself. Note well the tactics of the ambitious politician: nurse a sense of grievance to divide the people. Make sure you take the side of whoever is in the majority. To be sure, it is not wrong to defend the cause of the oppressed. God himself promises to do this very thing for his people. God sometimes exalts men to positions of authority to be agents of his righteousness in this regard. However, sinful man often manipulates this process as a means to obtain and preserve power for themselves. So it is with Sheba.

Having gained the hearts of the 11 tribes, Sheba prepares to make his move. David puts his concubines under guard and shuts them away as if in widowhood. Although God permitted him to have these concubines and overlooked the sin involved in this practice, David has apparently learned of the dangers of depravity in the sexual realm. The eye never tires of seeing, nor the ear of hearing. All the rivers flow to the ocean, but the ocean is never full. The concubines were also used by Absalom in an attempt to sinfully consolidate his power. With a new rebellion fomenting, David sets them aside. In this move, we see a sign of David's true repentance. His sinful lust is being contained. In

this, he is also safeguarded against its accompanying miseries.

David calls Amasa (his new commander in the place of Joab) to summon the men of Judah in three days, but he does not complete the task on time. So he calls Abishai to take a group of his servants and pursue Sheba before he can escape. However, when Amasa finally finishes the job given to him by David, he comes out to meet Abishai and his men. Among them is Joab, who used to have Amasa's job. When Amasa meets him as a brother, Joab grabs his beard to greet him with a kiss. As he does so he thrusts his belly with a hidden sword and Amasa's entrails spill on the ground. Joab has no patience for anything except that which must be done to preserve and maintain power. Amasa proved himself incompetent in the role, so Joab happily seizes it back for himself.

Ironically, the rebellion of Sheba would be quelled, but not in the way that Joab or David expected. Sheba flees the men of David and takes refuge in the city of Abel. When they are about to lay siege to the city, a wise woman speaks to Joab to mitigate the potential disaster. The woman is not named but continues a pattern seen in Hannah, Abigail, and the woman of Tekoa sent by Joab to David in 2 Samuel 14. The woman prevails upon Joab to cease his siege of the city, promising to deliver up Sheba's head and end the rebellion. It is through wisdom, not warfare, that the rebellion is ended. It is through that which is weak that the mighty are brought low. In this, we see a return to the theme with which we began the book of Samuel: the exalted are brought low and the humble are exalted.

David's kingdom continues to reveal itself as a "mixed bag." It is

we see positive anticipations of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see this both in the character of David as a man of faith and the blessings of grace that are poured out through him. We also see it in the judgment poured out upon the enemies of God and those who rebel against his will.

But David himself is not the Christ. Although God contains his sinful flesh, it is still present within him. The agents of his kingdom are far from pure. The kingdom of God is still hidden within an earthly shell. This typological kingdom anticipates the things that are to come, but also contains stark reminders that the end is not yet.

In the fullness of times this kingdom will shed its earthly, theocratic shell. The NT church has no earthly border, no human army, and no temporal power to call its own. In its weakness, it is closed in to trust only in the power of God. Its members are purified by the Spirit but must wage continual war against the remnants of the flesh that lay hidden deep within their hearts. Their battle is a spiritual one. They will be disciplined when they sin, and also suffer for righteousness sake. Rebels will rise up against it, at times from within their own numbers. Threats and division will afflict it, and at times their suffering will be great. But in the end, the kingdom will be the Lord's.

21

Chapter 21

#21 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 21:1-22

2 Samuel 21 contains the story of the vengeance inflicted upon the house of Saul for his killing of the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were not Israelites. They descended from the Amorites and were spared by Israel in the days of Joshua's conquest. In Joshua 9 we read of how they pretended to be people from a distant country and asked that a covenant of peace be made with them. They offered to become the servants of Israel if their lives could be spared. Israel failed to take counsel from the LORD and allowed themselves to be deceived. Their shrewdness spared their lives, but their deception caused them to be cursed. The story is a textbook case of God working out his holy purposes through imperfect and sinful situations.

The result was that Israel was morally bound to keep their oath. But God in his providence was still free to manifest the curse upon the Gibeonites. God is true although every man is a liar. Years later we see the curse manifested through Saul,

who put the Gibeonites to death. This act was in keeping with his corrupt character. Although Saul and his house had already experienced the judgment of God, this was a “loose” end that needed to be tied up. It was an unresolved “wrong” that needed to be made right.

Some might object that the proposed resolution was unjust. Seven sons of Saul were given over to the Gibeonites to make right the wrong. However, keep in mind that David’s sin also led to judgment on his own house, affecting his descendants. At the same time, Absalom was fully responsible for his own sin. God declares in the Ten Commandments that he is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me (Deut. 5:9). There is no injustice with God in these acts. Before him no one is innocent. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all worthy of death. If we live even a few moments, it is because of the mercy and grace of God.

In the midst of judgment and death, we also see mercy and life. Seven sons of Saul are put to death because of the broken oath of Israel through Saul. But Mephibosheth is spared because of the faithful oath of David.

Likewise, this entire episode occurred because of a famine in the land due to the bloodguilt of Saul (21:1). Upon David’s righting this wrong, the land is restored to a state of plenty under the blessing of God. God’s wrath is for a moment, but his favor is for a lifetime.

The chapter concludes with a summary of further war between

Israel and the Philistines. Emphasis is placed on the powerful character of the enemies of God's people. They are the descendants of giants, some with six toes and six fingers, wielding mighty weapons with near superhuman strength. David began his story by defeating Goliath as a weak boy with strength that only God could provide. As he began his story, so he now ends it with God making his strong out of weakness and mighty to save.

In these things, we see the patterns that will come to fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the coming of his kingdom, all wrongs will be made right. Mercy will be extended, but justice will also be executed. Christ will satisfy divine justice by making atonement through the blood of his cross. In our sins, we have broken our oaths to God, but Christ will never break his promises to us. In the weakness of his cross, he will defeat the greatest of our enemies. He appeared to destroy the work of the devil, and destroy it he did! David's kingdom previewed these ultimate victories, but his continued conflicts with the Philistines made it clear that God's kingdom had not yet fully come. In the strength of Christ, we do battle against the spiritual forces of evil. Some, like our flesh, are close at hand. Others are far off, working indirectly through earthly actors as spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. In patience and faith, we endure trial as David did, looking with eager expectation to the second coming of his greater Son, whose kingdom shall have no end. In him, all wrongs will be made right. There will be no more famine or curse. Wars shall cease to the ends of the earth. The church militant will become the church triumphant, and we shall attain to the fullness of God's rest.

22

Chapter 22

#22 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 22:1-51

2 Samuel 22 essentially contains the same content as Psalm 18. We may at first question why the Scripture would directly repeat itself in this way. This actually happens several times in the Bible. The books of Kings and Chronicles repeat a lot of the same material, as do the four Gospels. Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy also repeat regulations in different places.

God has a purpose in all that he reveals, even when he determines to speak the same word twice. When we look more closely at the content of this chapter, we can begin to discern God's purpose in placing it here at the end of the Samuel narrative. The song is a God-centered celebration of the works of the Lord during the life of David. It is a reminder that behind the scenes of the earthly drama the Lord has been working to reveal himself and his eternal kingdom. In this way, it functions as an interpretive key to the entire book. In earthly Israel, we see a typological manifestation of heavenly principles. In the

shell of the kingdom of David, we see the core principles of the kingdom of heaven.

There is much we could unpack in this Psalm. The structure of the song and its poetry are quite sophisticated, reinforcing its central message in profound ways. We do not have the space to explore this in a devotional meditation. Instead, let us simply unpack the broad theme of the Psalm noted above.

Having finished reading the chapter, you might have said to yourself: “Wait a minute...I don’t remember some of these things happening in the life of David.” Much of the Psalm utilized the language of theophany to describe the work of God during his reign. Verses 8-16 speak of the earth quaking in God’s anger with fire and thunder coming forth from heaven as the waters of the sea are parted and laid bare. The imagery recalls the previous revelations of God’s power and presence in the Exodus. They also anticipate the way God will reveal himself at the end of all things.

There is no error or misrepresentation of God in David’s description of the work of the LORD in his era. This is, after all, poetry—a genre replete with simile and metaphor. At the same time, it would be a mistake to reduce this to mere metaphor. David’s use of this language draws a direct connection between the power and presence of God in these apocalyptic events and what occurred in his life. What happened in the past through Moses and what will come in fullness in the future also manifested itself in his era. There is a direct point of contact between them all. It is the same power, grace, and kingdom of God that is coming. Behind the earthly scenes of the drama

of history, a larger story is unfolding. Behind Israel's conflict with the kingdoms of the earth is a spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.

We also see in this song a key principle regarding the nature of this kingdom. It is one of grace and mercy to sinners. In verses 21-28, we read of David celebrating the reward God has bestowed upon him for his faithful trust in God. At first glance, we might think these verses are advocating a principle of righteousness based on works. However, the bulk of the narrative of 2 Samuel is preoccupied with highlighting the heinousness of David's sin with Uriah and Bathsheba. The narrator also unfolds the just discipline of God in painstaking detail in its aftermath with the sin and rebellion of Absalom. David confesses and grieves over this sin in a way that he would not easily forget.

David's words in 22:21-25 must be interpreted in this broader narrative context. He is not pleading the merits of his righteousness. What he says about himself is only true because of the forgiving grace and mercy of God. He can say "I have kept the ways of the Lord" only because God forgave and put away his sins. He has erased from his record all sins and transgressions through the blood of David's son and Lord.

Although his obedience was imperfect, it was sincere and real. It was the fruit of God's Holy Spirit in him. Especially in the first part of his life David sincerely trusted in God and proved it in good fruit. He was merciful and forgiving, blessed those who cursed him and repaid evil with good. As he confesses in verse 33, it is God who "has made my way blameless."

Far from advocating a principle of works that contradicts God's grace, David's statements regarding himself are only true because the kingdom that God revealed during his reign was one of grace and mercy.

That is why the song repeats the key theme of the Samuel narrative enunciated at the start of the story. As the story begins, so it now ends. Recall how the book began with an emphasis on the exaltation of the lowly and the humiliation of the proud. Lowly Hannah was exalted in the gift of Samuel while Penninah was brought low. Little Samuel was exalted as a boy priest, while the house of old Eli was brought low. The boy David was exalted over the giant Goliath. Verses 32-43 contain an extended poetic exposition of the principle, detailing the various ways God's strength was manifested in David's victories. Note especially verse 28: "You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down."

God's kingdom, therefore, will not come through earthly power. Man will not bring in God's kingdom by building from earth to heaven through their own power. Instead, it will come from divine interposition from above. It will be extended by God's power, not human strength. It is given as a gift to sinners, not as a wage for meritorious works. All we contribute is the sinfulness from which we need to be redeemed—whether murderous anger, evil plots, murderous conspiracies, or sinful lust. These things were manifested just as much in David as in other figures like Saul, Absalom, Abner, and Joab.

David's role as an agent of this kingdom is solely the fruit of God's grace. He freely gave an oath and promise to secure his

line as the one through whom the Savior would come. At his birth, we see the fruit of God's promise realized in history. As a baby Jesus entered this world in weakness. In the days of his flesh he endured the "humiliation" phase of his ministry even to the point of the death of the cross. He will not engage in a sinful conspiracy to seize power but will be subject to such an evil plot when tried and crucified. God has now exalted him and made him sit on the throne of David. His kingdom shall have no end.

This kingdom was advancing "behind the scenes" of David's earthly life. It continues to do so for us today. Behind the earthly scenes of our life, God's heavenly purposes are being worked out. Outwardly we seem to be fighting a losing battle, slowly wasting away in the great conflict of a life of faith. But inwardly we are being renewed by the Spirit and power of God day by day. We walk by faith, not by sight. The power of resurrection is in us already. Although with David we may have days of discouragement, we can also be certain of the ultimate triumph that has already been obtained in Jesus Christ.

23

Chapter 23

#23 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 23:1-39

A man's last words always carry extra weight. If you only had one more opportunity to say something to the most important people in your life, what would it be?

The Bible has several chapters that contain a person's last recorded words. Deuteronomy records Moses's final sayings before Israel enters the promised land. Joshua 24 tells the story of the renewal of God's covenant at Shechem. Joshua utters his final words to Israel, famously declaring: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). Paul's second letter to Timothy also bears the marks of being his final letter. Although all his letters carry a special weightiness as part of the capstone of God's revelation, his final "charges" to Timothy are even more so.

2 Samuel 23 records the last words of King David. Like his song of deliverance recorded in chapter 22, these words reflect

back on the previous years of his life, offering a theological interpretation of what God had once done in him and through him.

Hindsight is 20/20. David always believed the things he stated in these verses, but his feelings did not always align with the certainty of God's promises. We know this from numerous Psalms from the earlier period of his life where he often struggled to attain the certainty he expresses here. When we are in the valley, it is hard to see what lies beyond the mountain in front of us. We must simply trust that the one who made our map did an accurate job.

These last words record three distinct theological realities that not only inform David's self-understanding but also his place in redemptive history. First, David reflects upon his role as an agent of revelation. The words he writes in this chapter are not just his personal thoughts, but an "oracle" of God. The words he speaks are not his own, but those of the Spirit of the LORD (23:2). As Christians we believe that the Bible is "inspired" by God. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul speaks of Scripture being "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*). Peter likewise states that holy men spoke from God as they were "carried along" by the Holy Spirit. All these men obviously acknowledge that God used human agents to write the words of the Bible. But the human role is secondary to the primacy of Divine authorship. As Paul elsewhere states, the result of this process is "not the word of man...but the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13).

Clearly, the mere claim that someone is speaking the word of God is not sufficient to establish them as inspired prophets

of the Lord. Many books claim to be a revelation from God but clearly manifest themselves to be the fallible words of man. Our full confidence in the authority of God's word stems from the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures as we are confronted with the divine truth of its content in our hearts. This is not a purely "subjective" confidence. The internal testimony of the Spirit comes through the objective content of Scripture that can be thoughtfully processed by the human mind. We believe that the Scriptures are self-authenticating. Just as the sun carries evidence from itself that it is the source of light, so also the Scriptures emanate Spiritual light that reveals itself to be the source and foundation of truth.

Secondly, David reflects on the fact that God manifested his glory and kingdom through his rule of Israel. The kings of Israel were to rule in righteousness according to the will of God expressed in the Scriptures. This was not merely a matter of the raw application of the law according to abstract "justice." God's kingdom is one of justice, but also one of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. David manifested these unique characteristics of God's kingdom in the way he obtained the throne and governed Israel from it. He forgave those who rebelled against him, returned evil with good, and sacrificed his own well-being for the sake of his subjects. Those who were wise to the way of the world were often baffled by his behavior. They were blind to God's greater purpose in the establishment of the kingdom of David. His chief function was not to bring temporal glory to the nation but to manifest the greater glory of the kingdom to come.

Finally, David emphasizes the covenant promise of God for the

establishment and success of his kingdom. Recall that these were tied to God's promise to bring eternal salvation through his greater Son. Although the temporal nation would come to an end due to their unfaithfulness, God would be faithful to his promise and bring his eternal kingdom. Let God be true although every man is a liar. Both the salvation of God's people and the destruction of the wicked are sure and true in God's plan.

The second half of the chapter outlines David's mighty men who fought with him in battle. There are many theological and spiritual points to be observed here. The list doesn't simply include names, but records deeds of valor and loyalty from the soldiers to their king—and ultimately to the Lord. God will not forget our sacrifices or acts of faith for his sake. Those who honor him he will honor. His grace is such that he remembers none of our sins but keeps a record of our acts of faith.

Recall that the previous chapter reminded us that it is ultimately God's power and strength at work in all things. Throughout OT history he is revealing and bringing his eternal kingdom. This chapter reminds us that God's strength is at work through human means. Sometimes he utilizes that which is weak and lowly. Other times he operates through human strength, valor, and bravery. In different ways, both manifest his glory. He is free to work how he wills in his good time.

Finally, it is quite noteworthy that there are several Gentiles among David's mighty men. The kingdom promised to David would not ultimately be limited to the region of Canaan. Even when it reached its greatest extent under Solomon this was

but a small preview of its fullest reach. The Son of David has come and his kingdom reaches from Israel to the ends of the earth. The vast majority of us who will read these thoughts today are not descendants of Israel. We are among the fallen Gentile sons of Adam. For millennia we were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel without hope and without God in the world. We were enemies of God. By his grace, we have become soldiers of Christ, made mighty in weakness by the almighty strength that only God can provide.

24

Chapter 24

#24 - Devotional Meditations on 2 Samuel 24:1-25

The final chapters of 2 Samuel have a purposeful structure and arrangement. Although much of the book follows the simple chronological order we would expect in a narrative, things change as we approach the end of the book. David's "last words" in chapter 23 do not appear at the very end of the narrative. Likewise, the list of David's "mighty men" records names and deeds that cover a long stretch of his life. Several poetic and "thematic" chapters interrupt the narrative flow of the book only to have us return to the story in 2 Samuel 24.

The story of David as told in Samuel does not end on a high or happy note. David's story arc has taken different shapes over his life. First, he moved from a state of humiliation to exaltation as he suffered for righteousness sake. Maintaining a high level of spiritual focus, he manifested in an unprecedented way the character and heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, his greater Son. In this, he was a positive type and forerunner of Christ.

In the second part of the narrative, he repeats the same pattern of movement from humiliation to exaltation, only this time for very different reasons. Due to his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, he came under the fatherly chastisement of God. He did not fully depart from David as he did from Saul. But David's fall definitely caused him to lose some of the typological luster attached to the ways he manifested the heart and character of Christ.

David thus reveals the Savior, but he himself is not the Christ.

This is an important point for the narrator (inspired by the Holy Spirit) to emphasize. In the later historical books, David will be the exemplar by which subsequent kings are measured (see 1 Kings 14:8, 15:3, 15:11, etc.). From this, an Israelite might wrongly conclude that God's promised restoration involved a literal reinstatement of David himself to Israel's throne. The Messiah would indeed be a son of David. But he would also be the eternal Son of God—not just David's son but also David's Lord.

By concluding the Samuel narrative with the story of David's census and its subsequent chastisement by God, we leave the story of David on a note of disappointment. Ironically, the ultimate point is to show ancient Israel (and us!) that our ultimate hope and faith must not be in anything earthly. As David confessed in his previous poetic declarations, his strength came not from man or anything on the earth. It was the Lord that made him mighty in battle.

The sin of the census was the fact that it manifested David's

desire to put his hope in the earthly force of his nation. That is why the numbering specifies that there are 800,000 valiant men who draw the sword as well as 500,000 in Judah. David wanted to know how large his army was as a measure of his earthly might. He knew from his own life that God could just as well work through a single weak boy as through a mighty man. With the Lord, a single man can rout 10,000.

David realizes his folly of his own accord (24:10), but the sin does not go without God's chastisement. In this case, the discipline is quite severe. David must choose between three options and eventually settles on three days of pestilence. Ironically, the decision to willingly undergo this discipline also manifests faith in God's mercy. The pestilence will come more immediately from the hand of God. Although his wrath is great, his mercy is even greater.

David's foolish sin is a stark reminder that we cannot put our hope in anything earthly. Even the greatest kings that especially manifest the character and coming of Christ are still fallen sinners. The ancient kingdom of Israel truly typified the kingdom of God, but in itself remained merely a temporal kingdom of this world. Those kingdoms are all infected with sin. Their end is only misery and death. Our hope is in the mercy of God freely extended from heaven.

David's sin as a king brings misery and death upon the sheep of God. In the fullness of time, David's son and Lord would arise. Through his obedience and righteousness blessing would come to his people. It is particularly noteworthy that the narrative ends with David building an altar of sacrifice to atone for his

sin. It is not David's righteousness that will redeem Israel. It is only the sacrifice of a substitute that can atone for the sins of David and all the people.

When the Son of David arises to bring in God's eternal kingdom, he will offer a final sacrifice, shedding his blood for the sins of all his people. Although David's tomb would abide until the day of Christ, Jesus would not remain in the grave. Having accepted his sacrifice, he would be raised from the dead. Exalted into heaven he would sit forever on the throne of David in a kingdom that has no end. Our hope can only be in him. God is merciful. When we sin he may chastise us but will relent in his mercy. He may bring us faithful leaders through whom we experience the blessing of God. But these things remain temporary, mixed with many sins and imperfections. Our hope must solely be in Christ, who alone can redeem us from our sins and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.