

MONDAY, 5/20

Read 2 Samuel 1:1-27.

As we turn the page to 2 Samuel, King Saul and his son Jonathan are now dead. When a battle against the Philistines turned in their favor, Saul took his own life by falling on his sword. He died on the battlefield along with three of his sons.

2 Samuel opens with David's discovering the news. One of the soldiers who had been in the fight came to David, giving David the news that Saul and Jonathan had perished. The soldier recounts how Saul had been wounded and had requested that his own soldier finish the job lest he fall into Philistine hands. The soldier had taken the king's crown and brought it to David. The soon-to-be king did not take too kindly to the soldier's actions. David had too much reverence for Saul's God-given position to harm the king, which we saw in 1 Samuel 24 and 26. As a result, David has the soldier killed for having killed the Lord's anointed one.

David and his men are grieved by the news. They respected Saul's position as the one God had anointed, even if he had not lived up to his call. They mourn for Saul and Jonathan and for the nation they served.

David, the musician and songwriter, pens a lament for Saul and Jonathan in verses 19-27. The song is equal parts grief and celebration. He mourns their loss and celebrates their lives.

One notable line is verse 26, where David says, "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women." Given the depths of Jonathan's commitment to David's wellbeing and the tension in David's marriages, this isn't surprising. The dynamics of friendships and marriages are different. Trying to juggle three wives would become an obstruction to deep, meaningful connection to any one of them.

Again, this verse reflects the power of loving our friends well. Jonathan and David's friendship was propped up by Jonathan more so than David. He was faithful to David. Jonathan offered him wisdom and proved trustworthy when David had no one else to turn to for help.

We will see how much David will miss that friendship as we delve further into his story. David could have used Jonathan's wisdom and willingness to speak truth into his life. David will be plagued with bouts of pride, which will get him into trouble. How grateful we are for those friends who, like Jonathan was to David, are such a help to us in this life.

Praying Together:

"Father, we thank You for the amazing people in our lives who speak truth in love to us. We need the wisdom and perspective of others. Thank You for the life-giving relationships in my life. Amen."

TUESDAY, 5/21

Read 2 Samuel 2:1-7.

I love how this chapter opens. "In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord," he said. This isn't the first time David seeks the Lord in such a way. There are several pivotal moments in his life that he turns to the Lord in fervent prayer. This is a glimpse into David as the man after God's own heart.

It is fitting to say that David was at his best when he was inquiring of the Lord. Every time David sought the Lord, he acted in alignment with God's character and will. He sought the Lord because he wanted God's instruction and direction. We too are at our best when we seek God's wisdom for our lives. When we saturate our lives in prayer, we can expect the Lord to lead us. When we pursue His will, God will help bring us into alignment with His desires.

On the flip side, it is when David stops inquiring of the Lord that he gets himself into trouble. He begins to act out of his own desires. When those rise to the surface, wisdom goes by the wayside, sin follows, and David harms others around him. We would do well to learn from David's mistakes.

Out of David's prayer comes the revelation for him to move to Hebron. When David settles there, he is made king. This is his first step to becoming king over all of Israel.

Before 1 Samuel, Israel was made up of twelve tribes joined together by blood and covenant. However, each tribe acted autonomously. They asked for a king because they recognized the need to become a unified nation. Saul was their first king. Now that he is dead, they will have to deal with the complications that accompany naming the succeeding king.

For now, however, David is recognized as king over the tribe of Judah. His first act as king is to bless the men who buried Saul. This is in keeping with David's respect for Saul. David was always faithful to Saul both in life and death. This care was born both out of David's reverence for God and love for Saul, whom he saw as a father.

It is worth noting that as a king, David is eager to bless. Oftentimes, kings seek blessings for themselves, but David is ready to bless others, especially the Lord. This must have been refreshing given Saul's anxiety-plagued efforts to bring himself glory.

I wonder what it would look like to be someone who was eager to bless others. It can be easy for us to default to seeking blessings from others. We can sometimes be more interested in being blessed than being a blessing.

One look at the life of Jesus and we see that He was always looking for ways to bless His Father and others. He went about His days with eyes opened for opportunities to serve and draw others nearer to the Lord. I wonder what it would look like for us to do the same. Imagine what our days would look like if we seized opportunities to bless others and the Lord.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, open my eyes to opportunities to serve You and bless others. I know You have given me every good thing, so work in my heart that I may seek to bless before I desire to be blessed. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 5/22

Read 2 Samuel 2:8-3:1.

We've all heard and seen the dangers of power. Now with Saul in the grave, the opportunity for power leads to conflict.

Abner, Saul's faithful commander, takes it upon himself to make one of Saul's remaining sons, Ish-bosheth, king over some of the tribes of Israel. It was common practice for the son of a king to

replace his father, but we know that God has chosen David to rule over his people rather than Ish-Bosheth.

David's and Saul's houses would clash against each other for the sole title of king over Israel. In this chapter, a battle between a few David's and Ish's men turns into a battle of many. A fierce fight takes place and valuable lives are lost.

We need to remember that this is a civil war. Israel had clashed with the Philistines for much of 1 Samuel, but now they are fighting against brothers and cousins. Even Abner becomes fed up with the tragedy of it all. This is a reminder of the dangers that follow when we make enemies of our colleagues. With a contentious presidential election before us, the rhetoric I hear from both sides feeds such a perspective. It is no longer about seeing differently than your neighbor. It is that they are evil and an enemy to your wellbeing and that of your family. We cannot fall prey to such foolishness, nor should God's people perpetuate such things. We are peacemakers, called to seek righteousness and mercy.

In the end, David's losses pale in comparison to that of Saul's remaining household. 2 Samuel 3:1 sums it up well: "The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker." It is clear that God's blessing was on David and that it was only a matter of time before David would become the king of the entire nation.

Praying Together:

"Lord, be with us as we navigate the conflicts of our day. You have shown us what it looks like to live with mercy and righteousness in a fallen world. Fill us with Your love. Help us to be neighbors rather than make enemies. Amen."

THURSDAY, 5/23

Read 2 Samuel 3:6-21.

Abner was the epitome of a faithful soldier. He had served Saul both in life and in death. Abner fought against David on behalf of Saul's house for years. However, chapter 3 shows us that there was a falling out with Saul's son Ish-Bosheth.

When Ish-Bosheth accuses Abner of his sleeping with his father's concubine, Abner erupts in frustration. Abner was loyal to Saul and would never do such a thing. The fact that Ish-Bosheth would accuse him puts a bad taste in his mouth. Abner has no desire to serve Ish-Bosheth, so he makes an agreement with David to make him king over all of Israel.

The interesting thing about this is that Abner makes reference to knowing the Lord's promise to make David king of Israel, and yet he fought actively against David to prevent this very thing. It's hard to understand why. I suppose the most plausible explanation was that Abner had a place of prominence in Saul's household. It's unclear if he would be given such a position in David's house, or if David would even allow him to live. Perhaps, he was loyal to a fault.

Whatever the reason is, Abner shifts his allegiance to David. David agrees to Abner's help and asks Abner to bring his wife Michal back to him. Saul had taken Michal back into his home, so David had spent years away from her. Abner speaks on behalf of David to the elders of Israel, trying to convince them to finally make David king. One thing we can take away from Abner here is the need to make sure our priorities are straight. We see Abner shift loyalties. He serves Saul before the Lord. As those born anew in Christ, we must express the heart of Jesus who says ultimately to the Father, "Your will be done."

Praying Together:

“Lord, we are grateful for Your faithful love toward us. Help us to give our loyalty and affection to You first. Amen.”

FRIDAY, 5/24

Read 2 Samuel 3:22-39.

It has been seven long years hiding in the wilderness. David confronts Saul without harming him. Saul concedes that David is the rightful King of Israel; however, the transfer of power is not immediate. It won't be long before David takes the crown, but the wait is longer than expected. Though impatient, David acknowledges that his rule is an appointment of God and that His will cannot be hurried. David will not fight anyone for this appointment, as it was gifted to him by God Himself. David's being crowned king will come in God's--not David's--time.

Now that David is King of Judah (Southern Kingdom), how will he win the Northern Kingdom, which is still loyal to King Saul? As we continue to watch the history unfold, we see Saul's heir Ish-Bosheth as he feebly tries to protect his place in line to the throne. He will be unsuccessful and overshadowed by a bigger threat to the throne of the Northern Kingdom--Abner.

Abner is sneaky. He knows that Saul's concubines are a sign of royal power and authority, so he decides to take one of those concubines. He takes advantage of Ish-Bosheth's inability to lead, his lack of courage, and timid approach to politics. Abner lays down a public challenge to the throne, a challenge he will win against the weaker Ish-Bosheth.

With Ish-Bosheth out of the way, Abner turns to David to negotiate for the crown. David wants Saul's daughter Michal back, in order to claim legitimacy in the eyes of those left in Saul's kingdom. According to Walter Brueggeman, Abner is following God's will and is acting as a vehicle of Yahweh for two reasons. He speaks to the elders of Israel, so that they understand that David follows God's will and that he can defend Israel from the Philistines. Also, Abner makes a covenant with David and Israel possible.

How many of us have the patience of David to wait for God's timing? David recognized the gift of the position to which he was appointed by God. Though David was impatient at times and frustrated at the long delay in being named king of all of Israel, he recognized the importance of prayer and humility during the wait times. David had some learning to do about himself and the others that played a role in the gift of the Kingdom. What should we do when we are facing trying circumstances? How do we keep our eyes and ears open to the next steps in this process?

Praying Together:

“God, we can see Your presence in this. Test our patience. Teach us how to truly listen to what You are telling us. Mold us and change us in whatever way You wish so that we will be better prepared to follow Your will first and foremost in our lives. Amen.”

SATURDAY, 5/25

Read 2 Samuel 4:1-12.

Justified righteousness--that is what killed Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth. We know Saul pursued David relentlessly before he recognized that David was kind, forgiving, and merciful to Saul's family. King Saul acknowledged that his jealousy had blinded him against David. And somewhere deep

down, Saul knew that his initial anointing was no longer in effect, given his disobedience of God and his jealousy of David.

David's men were also suffering alongside their leader. They saw how David was pursued and what he had to sacrifice to stay hidden. They wanted him to kill Saul for all that Saul had done to David, but David refused. His men did as they were told, yet they remained angry and frustrated. They did not have that connection to God the way David did. They did not take the time to clear their hearts of their anger. For them, this was an injustice that needed to be avenged. The culture mandated an eye for an eye—to take revenge against the many wrongs Saul had committed against David.

If David's men relied solely on their cultural teachings, they would be justified in killing Saul and his sons. They would be not only justified, but convinced they were right. David's men were seeking glory to satisfy their desire for revenge—not to honor God.

David did all he could to approach his role as king by valuing peace, justice, and fairness. He would do all he could to keep the peace, but he knew eventually he would need to act in the name of justice as he walked with God on all things. We know he is not always acting out of peace or fairness, but in this case, he will have to make a statement to keep his oath to Saul and others who know David's promise to protect Saul's descendants from harm.

So when his men bring Ish-Bosheth's head back to prove loyalty and earn David's respect, David was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Yes, they killed their enemy's heir to the throne. The problem here is two-fold: David had promised to protect Saul's descendants. Ish-Bosheth was harmless, incapable of leading a nation. There was no reason to have killed him. David would have to deal with the assassins. Killing them by cutting off their hands, feet, and heads sent the message that David did not approve of Ish-Bosheth's death.

Have you ever considered the consequences of giving in to your anger and saying or doing things that hurt others? Our actions committed while angry close our hearts to God's voice. Too often, our speech and behavior are used to serve our purposes more than God's.

Praying Together:

“Gracious God, focus our eyes so that we do all and say all according to Your purposes. Push us to test our resolve so that we can keep You in front as we decide our next word and our next step. It is Your will we pursue. Amen.”

SUNDAY, 5/26

Read 2 Samuel 5:1-5.

My children used to love playing with Legos. They were quick to learn that as long as the Lego brick snapped into place, they could construct larger and larger buildings. It was that “snap” that assured them that their Lego structures would be sturdy and not fall apart.

If you think about the twelve tribes of Israel, each one was different from the others, and each was strong in its own right. If they came together, united and in agreement, their unity would make them powerful. A tribe is like a Lego brick. The “snap” you hear when the bricks come together is what gives them strength and influence as a whole. The snap between the bricks is the covenant. David will enter into this covenant with the tribes, knowing that he needs their support to be able to lead as the king of Israel.

We know from scripture that all twelve tribal “bricks” and David form a covenant. It is from this covenant that David will lead as king.

In this chapter, the elders expressed their support for David. They noted that, even during Saul's reign, David was the one who led them out of the darker times. They remember that God anointed him to be the king of Israel and that David would become shepherd over all the people of Israel. Without hesitation, Israel's elders surrounded David and anointed him as their new king.

Some sources say that David was anointed by Samuel when he was fifteen, taking the throne fifteen years later. King David reigned 40 years. His fifteen years of preparation were not too long compared to the length of his reign. The greater the task, the longer the time of preparation.

What is God preparing you to do? Do you have a calling on your life? How do you remain faithful to that calling when your impatience grows the longer it takes?

Praying Together:

“Lord, help us learn how to “snap” into Your grace. Help us find the strength and patience as the wait for fuller, richer connection to You takes longer than we expect. It is in Your name we pray. Amen.”