

# What Does It Really Mean to Follow God's king?

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's on page 319 of the Church Bibles if you want to follow along. 2 Samuel 15, starting at verse 13. A messenger came and told David, The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.

Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, Come, we must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to sword.

The king's officials answered him, Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses. The king set out with his entire household following him, but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace.

So the king set out with all the people following him, and they halted at the edge of the city. All his men marched past him, along with all the Kerithites and Pelethites and all the six hundred Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath, marched before the king.

The king said to Ittai the Gittite, Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. You came only yesterday, and today shall I make you wander about with us when I do not know where I am going.

[ 1 : 18 ] Go back and take your people with you. May the lord show you kindness and faithfulness. But Ittai replied to the king, As surely as the lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.

David said to Ittai, Go ahead, march on. So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him. The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on towards the wilderness. Zadok was there too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the Ark of the Covenant of God.

They set down the Ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city. Then the king said to Zadok, Take the Ark of God back into the city.

If I find favour in the lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, I am not pleased with you, then I am ready.

[ 2 : 27 ] Let him do to me whatever seems good to him. The king also said to Zadok the priest, Do you understand? Go back to the city with my blessing. Take your son, Ahimaaz, with you, and also Abiathar's son, Jonathan.

You and Abiathar return with your two sons. I will wait at the fords in the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me. So Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.

But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered, and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too, and were weeping as they went up. Now David had been told, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. So David prayed, Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen. Hey, Lee, thanks very much for reading.

[ 3 : 32 ] My name's Martin Ayres. I'm the senior minister here. If you're here as a guest, it's great to have you. If you could keep your Bibles open at 2 Samuel 15, that would be a great help for me. It's on page 319 in the church Bibles.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you'd like to follow that, just to see where we're going with this. Jesus said the whole Bible is about him. The scriptures testify about him. So we're looking at these bits of the Old Testament that might be less familiar to us.

If you're someone who has a bit of familiarity with the Bible, these perhaps wouldn't be the bits of the Bible we've plumbed the depths of before. And yet God has given them as a gift so that we can

know Jesus better.

So let's pray and ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you that you have revealed yourself as you have acted in history.

And so we pray that you'll speak to us now by your spirit. You'll help us to hear your voice and respond rightly to you. In Jesus' name we pray.

[ 4 : 33 ] Amen. Amen. So, what does it look like to be known as a follower of God's King? The Six Nations are over and some of us have just about recovered from the match yesterday, or several matches yesterday.

And Scotland retained the Calcutta Cup. Congratulations. And the players involved in something like that, an international sport, they used to glory. And when I was at university, I played rugby in a very unglorious way.

But one of the guys I played with, his brother was playing rugby for England at the time, this guy Will Greenwood. And we went to watch him play for his club, Harlequins. It's a London rugby club. And I was with my friend Tom, and we were with Will's brother as well. The match finished, and I had to head off somewhere. I can't remember where. And Tom stuck around, my friend.

And Will was available after the team had finished and bathed and got changed. So, they wait around for Will, and they went into the Harlequins Club bar.

[ 5 : 37 ] So, Tom told me the next day what it was like. He said, they walked into this bar. He's there behind Will Greenwood, who's the kind of star player. And as they walked in, this packed out bar just burst into applause and cheering as Will walked in.

And as Tom walked in behind Will, he said, everyone was kind of patting him on the back and on the head because he was with Will. And they were all, it was this moment of great glory for Will. And so, anyone with Will got the glory. And Tom said, it was the best moment of his life. Okay. And it wasn't anything to do with him. Okay.

He just had a moment of reflective glory from being with the star man. Well, what does it look like to follow God's star man, his star player? God's star man is his king.

If you follow God's king and you're known as his, what does it look like? What could we expect? The whole Bible is a story about God's king. The story of our world is a story of God establishing his kingdom for his king and through his king.

[ 6 : 49 ] And that ultimate kingdom that's still to come was foreshadowed in human history under this great king, King David. It was around 1000 BC.

That's the time that 2 Samuel is recording the history for us. And David is one of the greatest men who's ever lived. He's a phenomenal man. He was an ancestor of Jesus.

And back in chapter 7 of 2 Samuel, as we've been working through it together, the story of David, in chapter 7, something incredible happened. God promised to David that someone from his seed, one of his descendants, would be God's forever king and reign forever.

God would keep his kingdom-building promises through one of David's descendants. That's why, when you turn to the New Testament, the very first sentence of the New Testament is a record of the family line of Jesus Christ, the son of David.

Because it's so key to the first century witnesses of Jesus that they were waiting for this great son of David to come. So we're looking at David's life story, his rise and fall, but what we see in David and how God dealt with David are shadows that help us to understand the reign and rule of Jesus Christ better.

[ 8 : 07 ] So we're getting to know Jesus as we see the shadows in what happened with David. And tonight we're looking at some of David's darkest days. They help us to understand what it's going to look like to be identified with God's king, Jesus, today.

So our first point, it's on the sheet, is Absalom rises to power with worldly greatness. And we get that in verses 1 to 6 of chapter 15. David has become the king of God's people, and as we were following David through to Samuel, he makes this incredible start, mainly because he's humble. He's a man after God's own heart. He loved the things that God loves. And so God, in response to having a king who's faithful to him and who's humble, God exalts David, he sets him as king, he gives the people rest from their enemies so they live in peace and security, and David rules the people with justice and mercy.

And then David brings the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, the city of David, the capital city. And the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament was a picture of the presence of God.

So God's king brings the presence of God in among the people of God. It's the high point in Israel's history. And then what we've seen is David spectacularly messes up.

[ 9 : 28 ] And now he's reaping the consequences of that in his own family. So as we pick things up here, David's son Absalom has decided to seize power from David. So as we look at Absalom, he is everything that a leader in God's kingdom shouldn't be.

He's like the antithesis of a leader that God would love. So let's just look at his leadership strategy at the start of chapter 15. The first thing you see is visible impressiveness.

Verse 1. In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with 50 men to run ahead of him.

So that's the kind of 1000 BC equivalent of the stretch limousine. The convoy of people, the groupies and fans that surround him wherever he goes. He is visibly very impressive.

Then look at the promises that he makes to win people over to himself from verse 2. He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate.

[ 10 : 30 ] Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, What town are you from? He would answer, Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.

Then Absalom would say to him, Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you. And Absalom would add, If only I were appointed judge in the land, then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice.

See what's going on? He promises. He gives people time. He gives people sympathy and he's turning people against the king. And he promises, Things would be so different if only I was in charge.

The next thing that David resorts to, sorry, Absalom resorts to, is flattery in verse 5. Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him.

So he looks the part, verse 1, impressive. He promises the world, verses 2 to 4, and he makes you feel special in verse 5. And it works.

[ 11 : 44 ] The people of God, Israel, were seduced. They get seduced by an ungodly leader. And we face the same problem today. If you think about what do we look for in a leader, in our leaders, visible impressiveness, don't we?

Even in churches, we're so impressed by charisma, by money, by a rich church, by property, by power and influence.

We get drawn in by false promises. So we grumble about the leaders we've got in our churches and we get sucked in by maybe we find a man with a plan of how things would be a lot better and we think, if only that person was our leader.

We see it in society. We see it in church. Things would be much better if only that person was our leader. And we get deceived by flattery so easily, by someone important giving us the time and the energy.

So the application for us as we look at Absalom rising to power among God's people is that we should watch out for leaders like him and we mustn't be like him ourselves.

[ 12 : 59 ] And Jesus makes that clear for us about life in his kingdom. We read this in Luke chapter 22. Let me read it for us. A dispute arose among the disciples as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Jesus said to them, the kings of the nations lord it over them and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that.

Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?

Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. So we need to be aware of that in the leaders that we look for.

There was a recent article online, a guy, Sam Albrey, who's a really good writer and he's writing on the Gospel Coalition website because it's become a worrying trend in churches that prominent church leaders are ending up being dismissed or resigning because they're domineering.

[ 14 : 06 ] They're bullies. And Sam Albrey's writing this article saying, there must be a characteristic that we're so longing for in a leader that we will choose a leader who's got that kind of

charisma and those characteristics and be blind to their faults if they're domineering.

Now, we need to remember that church leaders are in a position of authority. Hebrews 13 confirms that for us. They are in a position of authority, but are there things that we sometimes look for in our leadership that might be unhealthy?

Are we attracted by leaders who in reality are loaded over people? And Jesus says, but you are not to be like that. The greatest among you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves.

I was recommending to a few people last week this film that's come out at the moment, American Gospel. It's brilliant. It's about the prosperity gospel, which is the kind of, what they say is the gospel, but it's not the gospel.

Big churches all over the world, but big churches in America where health and wealth is promised from God if only you'll, basically, if only you'll give money.

[15:20] But this film, American Gospel, you can get it online. It's a brilliant film. But it looks at these kind of mega churches and this thing, the Word of Faith movement in America, these big speakers, and they draw in these great crowds and they create a great atmosphere, thousands of people going to their churches and they look very impressive and they flatter people around them and they draw people into their privilege.

They've got global reach. They fly around in private jets, but they're not the servant leaders that Jesus calls his leaders to be in his kingdom. You just have to look at the ranches and the estates that some of these Christian leaders live in to see that they are not servant leaders.

And as well as watching for that in others, we have to watch it in ourselves as well. To beware the seductive appeal of having other people serve us instead of us serving them. That maybe if we're having a hard time as well, we think in our pride, I deserve this.

You know, if you've started your own business and you've flogged yourself to make it work and then you're employing people, the danger is you think in your pride, you know, I deserve these people to serve me now. It's payback time.

But could we be different for Jesus if you've got people working for you to see yourself serving them? If you're a head teacher or a deputy head teacher, seeing yourself as there to serve the classroom staff in the school, to be the manager who's known because you want to invest in the people who work there.

[16:52] And we could think the same about leadership in our churches as well. There are Christian conferences you can go to on leadership and Christian books you can read on leadership where the focus is too much really on vision setting and charisma and then we put leaders on a pedestal instead of thinking about godly character and humility and servant-heartedness.

And Absalom is a great foil for us. His style is the very opposite of greatness in the kingdom of God. But for Absalom, it works. And that's terrible news for David.

So as it all goes wrong for David, he becomes a shadow of how life will be for Jesus, his greatest son. So our second point, David is sent into exile with humble trust.

He gets told the hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom. And imagine having to say this about your own son. It's his son, Absalom. But verse 14, have a look. Then David said to all of his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, come, we must flee or none of us will escape from Absalom.

In fact, he leaves so that the city will be spared from Absalom. So he leaves the city, verse 17, so the king set out with all the people following him and they halted at the edge of the city.

[18:10] It's this profound moment as they just wait at the edge of the city. The city that David had captured as king, he has to leave. And then we see his journey. He crosses the Kidron Valley, which was a boundary marker on the outside of Jerusalem.

Verse 23, the whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley and all the people moved on towards the desert.

And then he goes up the other side from the Kidron Valley, which is the Mount of Olives. If you look at verse 30, verse 30, but David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went.

His head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up. And folks, this is exactly the same journey that Jesus went on a thousand years later when he was rejected by the same city.

It was the night before the worst day of human history. Jesus prays to his heavenly Father in John chapter 17 in agony. And then John tells us this, the Apostle John.

[ 19 : 20 ] John chapter 18. He says, when Jesus had finished praying, he left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side, there was a garden and he and his disciples went into it.

The Kidron Valley, because it was on the outside of the city, it had become the place where the city disposed of the things it didn't want. And Jesus is being disposed of by the city just as David was.

Then we hear the very next thing that happens to David is that he's betrayed. Verse 31. Now David had been told Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.

He'd been one of David's closest allies. So David prayed, Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness. David writes about that betrayal in Psalm 41 and he says this to God.

Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me. And then friends, picture Jesus who must have known as he crossed the valley that he was following in David's footsteps.

[ 20 : 29 ] He enters the garden and John says this, Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

So Judas came to the garden guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. one who shared my bread has turned against me.

Which is as Isaiah had promised, he was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. So as we see how awful it must have been for David taking that journey out of the city, it deepens our understanding of what Jesus endured.

And as we see the sadness the crowds felt that day as they saw their king leaving, we're to feel the same kind of sadness that our world has rejected its king.

But as we see Jesus following David's footsteps, David also models for us how we should react when we hit dark days. He doesn't rage against God.

[ 21 : 40 ] He doesn't say God can't be good for this to have happened to me. No, instead he entrusts himself humbly to God's will. So what we see that in what happens with the ark. Zadok the priest has brought the ark with David but look at what David says in verses 25 and 26.

Verse 25 Then the king said to Zadok take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favour in the Lord's eyes he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again.

But if he says I'm not pleased with you then I am ready. Let him do to me whatever seems good to him. That's the kind of humility that God has looked for from his king throughout 1 and 2 Samuel.

God opposes the proud and he exalts the humble. That's what we heard at the beginning of 1 Samuel and it's what we see in the life of David. And we follow that example today.

It's a model for us as it points us to Jesus' humility. We might find that we're knocked sideways by something that happens in our life. we get struck down, we get perplexed.

[ 22 : 47 ] We cannot see why this has happened to us. Could we be humble enough to entrust ourselves to God?

I had a Christian friend Debs who was in a horrific car accident and she woke up in hospital with no idea where she was and what had happened.

The doctors were saying it was a miracle that she'd survived in the extraordinary probability that she had made it. But when she woke up in the hospital ward and was told you've had an accident her parents had put a notice on the wall for her when she woke up and it said don't ask why ask what for.

We believe all this will bring glory to God and blessing to others. And that's the Christian response to being struck down. We don't turn away from God if asking why is why would this have happened to me turning away from God.

Rather we turn towards God and we still have the questions but we're asking him what's this for?

So folks this is what God's king looks like in a world that rejects him.

[ 24 : 02 ] He's God's star man but he crosses the Kidron Valley. He's discarded and as David does that the people around him learn that following God's king can mean suffering with him.

So that's our third point. Ittai follows his king with loyal allegiance. The Gittites are a group of people who'd had things pretty tough. They were refugees. They'd arrived in Jerusalem and so David feels for them and Ittai who kind of represents them because they've just arrived and found somewhere for refuge and now if they leave the city with David they're going to be on the run again.

So he gives them a way out. If you look at verse 19 the king said to Ittai the Gittite why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom.

You are a foreigner an exile from your homeland. You came only yesterday and today shall I make you wander about with us when I do not know where I'm going? Go back and take your people with you.

May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness. So what a gift that David's saying to him even if you go back into the city I'm praying for you that God would still bless you.

[ 25 : 18 ] And that offer to Ittai allows Ittai to make one of the great statements of faith in the whole book. Look at what he says about God's chosen king in verse 21.

But Ittai replied to the king as surely as the lord lives and as my lord the king lives wherever my lord the king may be whether it means life or death there will your servant be.

David said to Ittai go ahead march on. So Ittai the Gittite marches on with all the families that are with him. He's had a very difficult time and now he faces this choice between what looks like comfort and security in the city that's rejected God's king or to follow God's king and face danger and to have nowhere to lay his head.

And he says wherever my lord the king may be whether it means life or death there will your servant be. So let me ask could we make our allegiance to God's king like his?

It's not quite the same. It doesn't necessarily mean we'll spend life out of the city. We're called to be in the world but not of the world. But in a very real sense to follow God's king today Jesus we are strangers and exiles in the world.

[ 26 : 43 ] We're here among the world serving our absent king until he comes again. And Ittai's heart for God's king is this great model for us of how we might respond to Jesus.

That we have seen in him God's authority God's anointing and we've seen kindness and compassion. And so even if like Ittai we feel like we're a foreigner to God's king we're new to this but we're willing to pledge our allegiance to him.

That's what it looks like. The apostle Paul in Philippians 3 says I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death.

In Colossians 1 he says I fill up in myself what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions. In Romans 8 he says that our future glory is not worth comparing to our present sufferings but he does say if indeed we share in his sufferings.

To be one of the king's people to be identified with him is costly. Jesus words if anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[ 28 : 03 ] I don't know what that's costing you today or what that will cost you. It might be good to ask yourself if you are a Christian what is it costing me to be a Christian?

Am I known as a Christian? Am I known as being with God's king? Am I willing to bear the cost? Where will it be costly?

Think at the moment about Jesus teaching on family and marriage and sex. To hold on to that in our culture is costly. Maybe we think about Jesus' claims and saying no one comes to the father except through me.

To hold on to that faithfully is costly. Or that he's going to judge the world as well as bring life. The temptation is to be brave enough to say we're Christians but not to stand up for Jesus' words where our friends would most object to them.

Ittai shows us what costly allegiance looks like. Choosing God's king over King Absalom. God's chosen one over security, worldly prosperity.

[ 29 : 14 ] And as we do that for Jesus we know the greatness of worldly powers like Absalom will soon be passed. God's king will win in the end. He's at God's right hand today. And we have more reason than Ittai to pledge our allegiance to God's king.

Because we know something else as well about God's king. David's demise here that we're seeing in 2 Samuel was ultimately David's fault. It was his adultery, his murder that led God to bring him under the judgment that we're seeing in these chapters.

So David crossed the Kidron Valley because of his own sin. But our king crossed the Kidron Valley not for his own sin but for our sin.

So that the punishment that brings us peace could fall on him the next day. So that by his wounds on the cross we could be healed. Could we follow a king like that?

Father God we praise you and thank you for the kindness and compassion of your chosen king the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you work in our hearts by your spirit that we could say for our own hearts and lives as surely as the Lord lives and as my Lord the king lives wherever my Lord the king Jesus

may be whether it means life or death there will your servant be.  
[ 30 : 43 ] Amen.