

The Return of the King

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[0 : 00] The passage this evening is found in 2 Samuel chapter 19 verses 8b through 23, and that is on page 324 in the Church Bibles.

Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes. Throughout the tribes of Israel, all the people were arguing among themselves, saying, The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies.

He is the one who rescued us from the hand of the Philistines. But now he has fled the country to escape from Absalom, and Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, has died in battle.

So why do you say nothing about bringing the king back? King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests. Ask the elders of Judah, Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters?

You are my relatives, my own flesh and blood. So why should you be the last to bring back the king? And say to Amasa, Are you not my own flesh and blood?

[1 : 14] May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you are not the commander of my army for life in place of Joab. He won over the hearts of the men of Judah, so that they were all of one mind.

They sent word to the king, Return you and all your men. Then the king returned and went as far as the Jordan. Now the men of Judah had come to Gilgal to go out and meet the king, and bring him across the Jordan.

Shimei son of Gerah, the Benjamite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. With him were a thousand Benjamites, along with Zeba, a steward of Saul's household, and his fifteen sons and twenty servants.

They rushed to the Jordan, where the king was. They crossed at the ford to take the king's household over and to do whatever he wished. When Shimei son of Gerah crossed the Jordan, he fell prostrate before the king and said to him, May my lord not hold me guilty.

Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. For I, your servant, know that I have sinned, but today I have come here as the first from the tribes of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king.

[2 : 33] Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, Shouldn't Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the Lord's anointed. David replied, What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?

What right do you have to interfere? Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Don't I know today I am king over Israel? So the king said to Shimei, You shall not die.

And the king promised him on oath. This is the word of the Lord. Great. Thanks Hayley for reading, Martin for leading.

If you are new here to St. Silas this evening, a big welcome to you. Lovely to see you in the right place this evening. And just to give you a heads up, we are in the middle of a series in 2 Samuel.

And this evening's reading actually covers chapters 18 and 19, but we have chosen a representative part of that to give us a bit of a flavor of what is happening in this section.

[3 : 33] So I will be referring to bits outside of our reading. So if you could keep the passage open, that would be great. Let me pray for us as we start. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for your incredible mercy to us. Please help us to live lives in response to that mercy. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, I don't know if you're much into history or spies or anything like that, but last week a book got released by a chap called Owen Matthews, and it's a book about possibly the greatest spy in history.

You don't know who it is. His name is Richard Zorge. And Matthews has entitled his book An Impeccable Sopai. And the subtitle of it is A Bad Man Who Became a Great Spy.

And from all accounts, it really sounds like an absolutely cracking story, that is, if you're into that sort of thing. You see, Zorge was a bit of a James Bond character.

[4 : 40] He lived in Japan just before the Second World War and into the start of the Second World War. And he played off the Nazis against the Japanese, all for the benefits of Stalin and Communist Russia.

And the biography tells, by all accounts, of some of his exploits. And they really are bonkers. So, for instance, he had a regular habit of crashing his motorcycle while drunk.

He did this all the time. And then here's one, my personal favorite story. He goes to the Nazi headquarters, of which he was a member, a big Nazi dude. And in the middle of the dude, he stands up on the bar, drunk at the time, waving a samurai sword above his head, swearing allegiance to Stalin and that he was going to chop off Hitler's head, much to the amusement of all his Nazi friends.

So good was his deception that he was offered the top Nazi job in Tokyo at the time. And eventually, when he was caught by the Japanese, the Nazis all defended him vehemently.

They said, no, no, he's a good guy. He's one of us. But his last words, before he was hanged, was, and I quote, the Red Army, the International Communist Party, the Soviet Communist Party.

[6 : 03] Now, in times of conflict, the question is asked, how should we deal with betrayal? This is perhaps a question that's relevant for us now at the moment.

So we think of Shemima Begin, who's been in the press recently, and others, British citizens, who have gone off to fight for ISIS and then have returned to Britain.

But if we look a little bit closer to home, how should we respond to betrayal in our own lives by the people around us, those that we trust and love?

Perhaps you're sitting here this evening, and you might feel like you've been betrayed or let down by a friend. Maybe an institution of some sort.

I'm sure you might know someone who's gone to church at some point and has felt let down by the church and has felt that they couldn't go back to it.

[7 : 06] How do we deal with that? How should we feel or respond to this? And in these chapters, while we might not get a clear answer on how we should deal and respond with that, we do see how God's king deals with betrayal.

And the big idea that I want us to take away from this evening is that the return of God's king means mercy for the guilty. So by way of context, in 2 Samuel so far, we have seen that the Lord's word that has been commanded in response to David's infidelity with Uriah, the Hittite's wife, has come to pass.

Everything that the Lord has said will happen has come to pass. And we see how David's family has been split as Absalom, David's son, has tried to usurp and topple David as king.

And so David has fled from Jerusalem. And in fleeing, he has still remained steadfast to the Lord despite his earlier indiscretions and mistakes.

So last week, you might remember, we saw how David went up the Mount of Olives into the wilderness and how that was a picture of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

[8 : 27] Now, the first thing that we see in our passage this evening that I want to highlight for us slightly before is that the Lord defends his king. So looking at the first part of chapter 18, verse 1 to 18 there.

We saw this really first in chapter 17, verse 14. I'll just read it for us. For the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.

The Lord defends his king. And practically what this meant was that David, although outnumbered and on the run, had time to regroup his troops in defense of the coming attack and the pursuers.

And next, we see that this place takes place, and the battle takes place in the forest of Ephraim. And although outnumbered, David's troops defeat Absalom's.

So telling, we read in verse 8 of chapter 18, if you just keep your Bible, look down, the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword. And so the battle is won by the Lord rather than any skill on David's part.

[9 : 39] I don't think Samuel is envisioning ends here or something like that from Lord of the Rings, if you're a bit of a geek, like forest fighting. Perhaps Tolkien knew his Bible, and no doubt he did.

But during the battle, what we see is the rebel prince Absalom gets his hair stuck in a low branch while his mule runs on. And so Absalom is left hanging helplessly.

And again, what do we see? David's Mr. Fix-It. Joab ruthlessly dispatches Absalom. He kills Absalom. So 18 verse 14, Joab said, I'm not going to wait like this for you.

So he took three javelins in his hand and he plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree.

And in the Lord's providence, Absalom's pride, his great pride, his hair has caused his downfall. And it's the same pride that has caused Absalom to reject God's chosen king.

[10 : 47] But what we see towards the end of chapter 18 is that when this news finally reached David, we read, the king asked, in verse 32, the king asked the Cushite, is the young man Absalom safe?

So David asked him, and the Cushite, that's the runner with the news, replied, may the enemies of my lord, the king, and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.

And for a father to hear this statement, it's really chilling. And so when David hears this, he replies, in verse 33, we see, the king was shaken.

He went up to the room over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, oh, my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom.

If only I had died instead of you. Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. And David is really broken with grief.

[11 : 44] And in this, we see the compassion of God's anointed king as a father for his enemies. So moving on, the next thing we see, the return of the king, looking at verses 1 to 15 in chapter 19.

But with Absalom dead, David exile, this leaves the land of Israel in a state of turmoil. You know what it's like when there's no rule in the land.

There's always going to be conflict and turmoil. Anarchy reigns. And so we read in chapter 19, verse 9 and 10, throughout the land, the tribes of Israel, all the people were arguing among themselves, saying, the king delivered us from the hands of our enemies.

He is the one who rescued us from the hand of the Philistines. But now he has fled the country to escape from Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, has died in battle.

And the issue is obvious, isn't it? So here we have David, God's anointed king, who had delivered the Israelites from the hand of the enemies, who rescued them from the hands of the Philistines.

[12 : 57] But how did the people express that gratitude to all that David had done for them? Well, they rejected David. So if you know your history, we'll refer back.

It's a bit like Winston Churchill. After the war, you know the story about Winston Churchill. He is the great wartime leader who led Britain through the war. And what did the people do immediately after World War II?

When the next election came, well, they didn't vote for him. They rejected Winston. And this verse really speaks of the fickleness of the human heart.

So you see, the issue is not simply that they've rejected David, but that they had rejected the Lord's anointed king and had anointed their own king over them for themselves instead of God's chosen king.

And this has been an issue throughout the book of 1 and 2 Samuel. So 1 Samuel 8 verse 6. I'll just read for us. But when they, that is the people of Israel, they said, give us a king to lead us.

[14 : 07] And what do we read? This displeased Samuel. So he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him, listen to all that the people are saying to you. It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.

You see, the people of Israel had a king. And that king was God. And so you can really feel the tension in the story at this point. The king is returning, the rightful king.

How will David respond to the betrayal, to the rejection? How will God respond to this betrayal and rejection? How is God's chosen king, that's the Lord's anointed, going to respond to this treachery and rebellion?

How would you respond when the significant people in your life reject and betray you? Well, what we see is an unexpected kindness by David.

So if you've got the passage open, just look down with me at verse 11. And we read, King David sent his message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests. Ask the elders of Judah, why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace?

[15 : 29] Since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters. You see, David, although rejected, reaches out to his enemies to restore peace.

He makes the first move. He takes the initiative. The Lord's anointed servant, the anointed king, acts first to bring peace and rescue and reconciliation.

And so joyfully, we read verses 14 and 15. Just look down. He won over the hearts of the men of Judah so that they were all of one mind.

They sent word to the king, Return, you and all your men. Then the king returned and went as far as the Jordan. And it's really incredibly humbling, isn't it?

Whenever we see this, when someone shows kindness, when they have every right to act indignantly. When someone says a peaceful word, when they could quite rightly say something sharp and cutting.

[16 : 36] When they speak truth in love, it's ennobling. It reminds of Mandela a bit, doesn't it? If you remember that far back. And it's the very best in humanity.

The best that we could ever hope for in ourselves and one another. And this brings us to our third point there. And that is the mercy of the king. So look at the back half of chapter 19, verses 16 to the end of chapter 19.

And this really is the thing that the author wants his hearers to remember. David's mercy. The mercy of the Lord's anointed king.

You see, the charge against the rebels is clear. We look at verse 21 in chapter 19. Then Abishai, son of Zeruiah, said, shouldn't Shumai be put to death for this?

He cursed the Lord's anointed. And notice, he doesn't mention that it's David that he's cursed, but that he's cursed the Lord's anointed, that he's rejected the Lord's chosen king.

[17 : 46] And the sentence for this rebellion is clear. Shouldn't Shumai be put to death for this? And what do we notice? Well, Shumai doesn't contest his guilt.

So look at verse 19 following. May the Lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day, my Lord. The king left Jerusalem.

May the king put it out of his mind. For your servant, I, your servant, know that I have sinned. But today I have come here as the first from the tribes of Joseph to come down and meet the Lord, my king.

See, Shumai doesn't deny his guilt, but he appeals for mercy on the basis that he has gone to meet in trust and repentance the Lord's returning anointed king.

And so David answers Shumai's accuser in verse 22. What does this have to do with you, the sons of Zeria? What right do you have to interfere?

[18 : 52] Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Don't I know today that I am king over Israel? And so the king said to Shumai, you shall not die.

And the king promised him on earth. But it's not just that the Lord's anointed king is merciful, but it's that it's an outrageous mercy. So look at how Mephibosheth speaks of David in verse 27.

My Lord, the king is like an angel of God. So do whatever you wish. All my grandfather's descendants deserve nothing but death from my Lord the king.

But you gave your servants a place among those who eat at your table. So what right do I have to make any more appeals to the king?

And what does David do? The king said to him, verse 29, why say more? I order you and Ziba to divide the land. And the land that that verse is speaking of is Mephibosheth's ancestral inheritance in God's kingdom, in the kingdom of Israel.

[20 : 03] You see, it's an outrageous and generous and overflowing mercy. And look, and how would you respond to such generous, overflowing mercy?

What is a reasonable way to respond to outrageous mercy shown to you? Well, look at how Mephibosheth responds in verse 30. Mephibosheth said to the king, let him take everything now that the Lord my king has returned home safely.

You see, Mephibosheth no longer longs to be under the rule and reign of the Lord's anointed king. He longs for the person of the king rather than any gifts that the king might give him.

And the book of Samuel is trying to paint a picture of the type of king that God's anointed king, chosen king, will be. See, in Deuteronomy 17, Moses instructs the people what kind of king they should have, that their king should be the king that God chooses, and that their king should be obedient to God's word.

And in Samuel, and in Kings, following Samuel, the authors paint a picture of what it's going to look like for God's people to have God's chosen king, and how tragic it is when they reject God's chosen king or when that king rejects being obedient to God's word.

[21 : 34] You see, what we see in this passage and in David is that the Lord's chosen king is that the return of God's chosen king means mercy for the guilty.

But what they saw in part then, we see fully in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus is the perfect king we long to have.

Jesus is God's true king forever whose return means mercy for the guilty. How should we apply that? How should we think about that?

Well, there's a couple of things that I want to bring up in this passage about how we can apply this to our hearts today. So three things there. God's rescue, God's judgment, God's mercy and we'll zip through these.

So God's rescue. So last week we saw God's rescue in that Jesus died for us in our place on the cross for our sins. But here we see it in that no matter how bad life gets, God will rescue and deliver those who turn and trust in him.

[22 : 44] Not because of anything they've done, but because God has rescued his anointed king, Jesus, by resurrecting him. David's situation was hopeless.

He was on the run, but God rescued him. And because God rescues his anointed king, we can be sure that God will rescue us in Jesus.

Life might be horrendous for you at the moment. I don't know your situations. But don't give up. Keep plodding forward. God has rescued Jesus.

God will rescue you. God's judgment. So the second thing to think about there, God's judgment. And in this passage we have a picture of what it will look like when Jesus, God's anointed king, returns.

So what is it going to be like when Jesus returns? Well, the Bible says that Jesus will return. And when he does, as God's chosen king, it will mean judgment for God's enemies, for their rejection of him.

[23 : 50] But what do we see? God will not rejoice over that. Oh, my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom, if only I had died instead of you.

Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. You see, God will grieve as an unchangeable heavenly father over his creation and that they have not accepted his offer of salvation in Jesus dying for them.

If only I had died instead of you. David wished that he could die in the place of his son Absalom, die in the place of his enemy.

but in Jesus, God's son, God died on behalf for our sins to reconcile us to God.

Will we accept this death for us? Or will we die for our own sins in rejection of God? But when God's anointed king forever, Jesus returns, it will also be a time of overflowing mercy, reconciliation, and restoration.

[25 : 05] So that's the final point there, God's mercy application for us. But when Jesus died on the cross, he died, who did he die for on the cross? He died for his enemies, for their rebellion, for their treachery, for Absalom, for the Absaloms of this world, that they might receive not judgment, but mercy.

And you see, we are a people who are in need of mercy. We need mercy in lots of little ways each day. But also, some of us, perhaps maybe a lot of us here, will go on to do some really outrageous things in life that will haunt us and that we know that we'll need God's mercy for.

And the promise of the gospel is that no matter what we have done, we can know forgiveness and mercy because Jesus died for us and drew near to us.

So, my favorite author, he's not a great example of a person, but his writing's amazing, Ernest Hemingway. Anyone read Ernest Hemingway? Maybe. Some nods. No.

I'm alone here. But in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Immovable Feast*, it's written, it was published after he died, he reflects on his life in this story and in particular he reflects on his various marriages.

[26 : 31] He's married four times. He wasn't brilliant at marriage. He kept on choosing moving on, shall we say. And he writes in this *Immovable Feast* of his first wife, Hadley Richardson, and he writes this.

He says, When I saw my wife again standing by the tracks as the train came in by the piled logs at the station, I wish I had died before I'd ever loved anyone but her.

It's enormous regret. Hemingway was someone who needed mercy, and some of us may end up feeling like that in our lives, that we need this kind of radical, outrageous mercy.

And the promise of the gospel is that no matter what we have done, we can know forgiveness and mercy, not because of our good deeds, not because of how we live. None of us live good lives, but because Jesus died and drew near to us.

But notice also where the people then had rejected David as the rescuer who saved them from the hands of the Philistines, we have all rejected King Jesus, who has rescued us from the biggest enemies of sin and death.

[27 : 49] And as David took the initiative then to fix the relationship, so Jesus has drawn near to us now so that we might be friends of God.

And so undeserving as we are, if we trust and obey in repentance God's anointed King Jesus, then we too, like Shammai, will know full forgiveness and mercy because Jesus has drawn near to us.

And if we understand the outrageous nature of this mercy, then we too, like Mephibosheth, will see our heavenly inheritance not as a place or land, but as a person, a glorious King Jesus.

Let me pray for us as we close. So Father, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the outrageous mercy of your chosen King, forever Jesus.

Please help us to respond rightly to his death and resurrection on the cross. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 00] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.