

2 Samuel 4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 May 2024

Preacher: Steve Palframan

[0:00] 2 Samuel chapter 4 is what we're going to be reading. Jen's going to come and read it for us. 2 Samuel chapter 4. When Ish-bosh-sef, son of Saul, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage and all Israel became alarmed.

Now Saul's son had two men who were leaders of raiding bands. One was named Benem and the other Rechab. There were sons of Rimmon, the Berothite, from the tribe of Benjamin. Beroth is considered part of Benjamin because the people of Beroth fled to Gideon and have resided there as foreigners to this day.

Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled.

But as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled. His name was Mephibosheth. Now Rechab and Berner, the sons of Vimmon of Berothite, set out for the house of Ish-bosheth.

[1:13] And they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noonday rest. They went into the inner part of the house as to get some wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach.

Then Rechab and his brother Berner slipped away. They had gone into the house while he was lying on the bed in his bedroom. After they stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head.

Taking it with them, they traveled all night by way of the Arabah. They brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to kill you.

This day the Lord has avenged my lord, the king against Saul and his offspring. David answered Rechab and his brother Berner, the son of Rebom of Berethoth, As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble.

When someone told me Saul is dead and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news.

[2:24] How much more, when wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed, should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you?

So David gave an order to his men and they killed him. They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool in Hebron.

But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in Abner's tomb at Hebron. Amen. Thanks so much, Jen. That's great.

Well, keep that passage open in front of you. We're going to have a look at it in a moment. But before we get stuck into the passage, I want, if I can, just to say to you a few words about how we go about understanding Old Testament stories like the one that we've just read.

We are here as disciples of Jesus Christ, believing that the Bible is not just a kind of interesting record of some things that happened in history, but that the Bible is the way that God speaks to us.

[3:31] The Bible is the place in which we engage with God. And by his spirit, he speaks to us, changes us and transforms us. So it's really important, isn't it, in these moments as we gather together as a church with the Bible open, that we are working hard to understand what this says carefully and thoughtfully.

And that's important on your own as well. If you're a Christian this morning and you're not spending time in God's word, you are, if you like, blocking your ears to God's voice, because God speaks through his word as we open it together.

And we want to be careful listeners. Now, I think that when it comes to Old Testament stories like the one that we have just read, our temptation, if you like, is to read it like a moral example, as if we're trying to use it to look for someone good that we can follow.

You know, so, ah, you know, I want to be like them. That's who I want to be. But let me suggest to you that that's not a very good way of reading the Old Testament. And let me tell you that for two reasons.

One of them is really clear in this passage. The first reason it's not a good idea to read the Old Testament looking for a moral example, someone who are, oh, yeah, I want to be like them, is because actually when you read the Old Testament, there aren't really that many people who you would really want to be like, yeah?

[4:46] Our story here is a pretty good example, isn't it, of that case. I mean, there are some exceptions in the Bible, but on the whole, the heroes of the Old Testament are rogues, flawed men and women.

David himself is a good example of that guy who starts out really well, and we'll be finding that in the beginning of 2 Samuel. But when you get towards the end of the story, you find that he kills a man in order to get his wife.

So if you look for moral examples as you read the Bible, as you read the Old Testament stories, what you end up doing really is just making up your own ideas of what you would like to be like. But the second reason why looking in the Bible just for moral examples is a bad idea is because of this, and that is that you and I don't really need moral examples, because our problem is not an absence of moral examples.

Our problem is that we need a saviour and a rescuer for being immoral, yeah? For disobeying God. Our big problem in life is that we have sinful hearts that are unable to obey God and love God and live for him.

[5:54] You know, the point of 2 Samuel is not so much read it and go, I want to be like David. It's not so much that. You're supposed to read 2 Samuel and go, I want David's God.

I want David's saviour. I want to know God like David knew God. I want the forgiveness that David experienced. I want to see how God is at work like David saw.

I want to see how God rules and reigns and saves and rescues. I want to see how God deals with moral failures and losers like David and like me. Not just looking for a hero or a saint.

And this is really important then for how we understand the book of 2 Samuel. So listen up to this, because I think there are a number of different ways that the Old Testament does this. But one particular one that I want to draw your attention to is this.

Is the Old Testament points us to knowing God and a saviour by giving us types. Types. Or if you like, foreshadows or mini pictures of the whole thing.

[6:54] Or models of the saviour. Or signposts to the saviour. Now these types aren't perfect. They don't have to be because they're not the real thing. They're just the signposts to the real thing.

They're just a type of the real thing that's still to come. But as people who know Jesus, because we read the whole Bible, right? So we know the end of the story. We know the coming of Jesus Christ. Actually, we read in the Old Testament and see how it points us forward in types to the coming Jesus. Now one last little bit of detail. I think there are three main types in the Old Testament.

Or three big signposts to the Lord Jesus. Based around three different jobs that are given to Old Testament characters. And they are prophet, priest and king.

Prophet, priest and king. God's people in the Old Testament have prophets. People like Elijah or Isaiah or Ezekiel or Malachi. And their role is to speak on behalf of God.

[7:55] The prophet is to speak God's words. They speak on behalf of the Lord. Thus says the Lord, they say. And people are to listen. Then we have the priests, those who provide sacrifices to deal with sin.

People like Aaron and Eleazar and Eli. People working in the temple to provide the forgiveness of sins through the sacrificial system. And then there are the kings.

Those people who rule and reign over God's people. People like Saul and David and Solomon. And in the New Testament, as we read the New Testament, what we find is that Jesus becomes the prophet, the priest and the king.

So Jesus is the one who comes and doesn't just say, thus says the Lord. He says, I am the Lord. I am the word, he says. He comes not just really as the priest working in the temple.

He becomes both the priest, the sacrifice and the temple, doesn't he? As he provides forgiveness for sins. And he becomes the king of God's people as he rules and reigns.

[8:58] Jesus, I've come bringing a kingdom. The kingdom of God is at hand, he says. And so as we read the Old Testament and you read to Samuel, what we are seeing is being pointed forward to Jesus in the area of these types.

So as we look at King David, he's not an example to follow so much as he is a signpost to Jesus, a type of Jesus. Sometimes David is a really brilliant, clear signpost.

And sometimes is he a battered, bruised, pointing in the wrong direction kind of signpost. But all the time he is a type of what is to come. Now, one last bit of introduction.

I want to say that this is brilliant. It is brilliant that the Bible is like this. You know, I know that you might be thinking, oh, my goodness, Steve, this is making this all very complicated.

I've got to think of prophets, priests and kings when I understand the Old Testament. I'm not looking for moral examples. I'm looking for something that points me to Jesus. Maybe you think, oh, that all sounds very complicated. But I don't think it is.

[10:01] It's brilliant, this. It's brilliant to understand the Bible like this because it is full of joy and hope. It's a message of grace and glory as we see more clearly Jesus in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

You know, it means, doesn't it, as you read the Bible, you don't go away going, must try harder, Steve. Must try harder to save myself. Must try harder to be a moral good person.

Instead, I go away going, wow, Jesus saves people like me. Jesus saves people like me. What great news.

I belong to him. He is my king, a better king than David. I'm in his kingdom and I belong to him. So with that in mind, let's have a look at this passage from 2 Samuel chapter 4.

And I'm going to start by making sure that the story is straight in our mind. So look down at your Bibles and let's work through it together. Our passage this morning starts with a terrified King Ish-bosheth.

[11:03] Ish-bosheth, if you remember him, is king of the northern tribes. But his father Saul is dead. His brother Jonathan is dead. The commander of his army is dead. And I'm guessing that Ish-bosheth is beginning to see a pattern.

And so despite his horror and dismay in verse 1, when you actually find him in verse 5, Ish-bosheth is taking a nap.

Now taking a nap in the middle of the day is not really a great idea, especially if you happen to be in a class at school or at work. But the writer is not making a point to us about the laziness of Ish-bosheth.

Instead, he's trying to say to us that he is vulnerable. In the Greek edition of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, it underlines this by adding in verse 6 that his housekeeper had also dozed off.

In other words, what we are finding here in verse 5 and 6 is an unguarded, vulnerable, sleepy king who should be awake. Which means that when Rakab and Barna, who verse 2 have told us are a couple of commanders from Ish-bosheth's army, when they come and find the king, they're able to walk straight in, pretending for the sake of anyone who asks that they're coming to collect wheat.

[12:14] Such are the poor defences around the king that in verse 6 you're told that they come right into the inner part of the house, by which they mean that they've made it to the king's bedroom. They are at the edge of the king's bed while he is dozing.

And what do they do while he's dozing off there on the bed? They stab him in the stomach and escape. If you look down at verse 7, it repeats that point with a bit more detail, which is that as well as king killing Ish-bosheth by stabbing him in the stomach while he slept, they also chop off his head and run away with the head.

Now that's pretty gruesome. But they have a plan, don't they? So the plan is that they head out, pun intended, to Hebron where David lives.

But again, importantly, they don't go down the main road. We are given the detail that they go the way of the Arabah, which is presumably so that no one will spot them. This is the back road down to Hebron.

I guess getting caught with the king's head in your backpack is a little suspicious if somebody finds you. If you look down at verse 8, you'll find that they've arrived at David's house in Hebron.

[13:22] And they think David's going to be really pleased with us. Look, we've brought the head of your enemy Ish-bosheth. So they say, don't they, verse 8b, Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to kill you.

This day the Lord has avenged my lord the king against Saul and his offspring. Now this turns out to be a massive miscalculation, doesn't it? The boys clearly didn't know the story of 2 Samuel chapter 1, where the Amalekite runner told David that he'd killed Saul, thinking, oh, I'm bringing good news for you, and actually ended up being executed for it.

So David likewise executes these two guys, telling them, verse 11, that killing an innocent, defenseless man in his own bed is a wicked thing to do. It's murder. And so David makes an example of them by chopping off their hands and their feet and hanging them at the pool of Hebron, if you just wanted a bit more gore at the end of the story.

Now that's the story, isn't it, of 2 Samuel chapter 4, but let us see together how it points us to the Lord Jesus Christ. And let me take you, if I can, through four steps, four steps that are made in the story that help us see the Lord Jesus here in 2 Samuel chapter 4.

The first one is this, step one, God makes David king. God makes David king. I hope as we are looking at 2 Samuel together that you're beginning to see this over the past few weeks, that the whole sweep of the story is this inevitability of David becoming king.

[14 : 51] You read the story and you're not meant to be kept in suspense, really. You're meant to go, oh, actually, this is only going in one direction. David is becoming the king. God had promised it to him back in 1 Samuel chapter 16.

And the events that we've been looking at are working to the end of God making David king. Death of Saul in battle, the defeat of the Israelite armies by Joab and his men, Abner changing sides, all these things.

Even verse 4, this detail about Mephibosheth, who's the boy who is dropped by his nurse. All of those point to the fact that there is no one left to challenge David for the throne of Israel.

David will have it. God will make it happen. Now, the point is that God is in charge. God is going to make David king in his own good time. That's why David says in verse 9 to these two thugs that it is the Lord who lives who has delivered him out of trouble.

In other words, Rechab and Barnet, you don't need to get involved here. This is not your thing to do. God is doing this. God will deal with this. You don't have to take it into your own hands.

[15 : 52] God will rescue me from Ish-bosheth, says David, just like he's rescued me from everything else. So that's the first step. God makes David king. Now, just see with me, just very briefly, just how helpful that is.

We live, don't we, in a world where God rules and reigns. And where the reign of God's king is inevitable. Jesus will reign. You don't have to worry about it.

You don't have to make it happen. You don't need to stress that you don't see it working out perfectly yet, because God will make his king king. That's what will happen. And so you can have great assurance, can't you?

The second step adds an important word to clarify that first step. And it's this. God rightly makes David king. He rightly makes David king. Now, this is important.

God's king, David, and the kingdom he rules will be established in rightness, not wrongness. It will be established in righteousness, not wickedness. That's, again, what David means in verse 11, when he calls these men out for their wickedness.

[16 : 54] You know, David's saying, I'm not going to weasel my way to the throne by acts of cunning and deceit and murder. No, I'm going to act righteously, and that's how I'm going to find my way to the throne.

It's not the throne at all costs. It's righteousness establishing David's throne. Again, what's interesting in the story so far is how often David has not grabbed the throne in morally dubious ways.

He's had lots of opportunities. If you know the story of one Samuel, you'll know that David has lots of chances to kill King Saul, but refuses at every time. He finds Saul asleep with his spear next to him and has the opportunity to kill him, but doesn't.

He's in a cave when Saul comes into the cave to go to the loo. He could have killed him then, but he doesn't. David doesn't do that because he knows that God will rightly establish him as king.

If you turn in your Bibles to Proverbs 16, you'll see this idea there. It's going to come up on the slide if you don't want to turn to it, but you can turn to it if you like. Proverbs chapter 16, verse 12. Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness, we're told.

[18 : 06] Now, again, you can see, can't you, just at this point, how David is a signpost to Jesus. Jesus is tempted by the devil right at the beginning of his ministry, and he is offered by the devil all

the kingdoms.

Listen, I'll give you all of this, he says. Just follow me. Bow down. Follow me, he says. Worship me. And Jesus refuses. Why does he refuse? Not because all the kingdoms won't be his one day, but because Jesus will rightly be made king, not through an act of wickedness.

King Jesus will be a good king, a king established by righteousness. So that's step two. So God makes David king. God rightly makes David king. Thirdly, and this is complicated, but you need to stay with me.

God rightly makes David king, even using wickedness. It's a bit more complicated, but it might seem initially to contradict what we've said. But notice this twist in the story, or really, I suppose it's an irony, isn't it?

That Rechab and Barna think that their wicked act will give David the kingdom and win them a place in his heart. But God's king, David, refuses to accept their actions and calls them out as morally wrong.

[19:15] He kills them for their wickedness, saying instead, God will redeem me, God will rescue me, God will give me the throne. And God does give David the throne, yeah? God does rescue David from Ish-bosheth and from the armies of Israel.

How does God do that? How is it that God rescues him? How does God in the end save him from Ish-bosheth? Well, using Rechab and Barna and their wicked action.

In other words, Rechab and Barna were wrong to kill Ish-bosheth, but they were right that God would avenge David and make him king. And even their freely chosen wicked action could not stand in the way of God making David king.

Now stay with me, because this I think is the big moment in the story, and this is the big help for us this morning if we will get this. In the story, you are given this picture of the sovereignty of God that is so great and so powerful, he is so in charge, that even the freely chosen, naturally desired wicked intentions of human hearts, selfish intentions of Rechab and Barna, the wicked actions springing from those things can only ever achieve God's righteous purposes.

Now let's get this straight. This is not the end justifies the means for God, as if God is going, well, you know, it's all going to work out in the end, so their wickedness doesn't really matter. It's not that at all, is it?

[20:47] Now what you've got in 2 Samuel 4 is God working at such a high and sovereign level that they can be free to pursue their wicked desires and actions, and yet can only ever achieve God's plan and purposes.

He's not for a moment endorsing their wickedness or giving them a free pass because it results in something good. The other point is that God's sovereign power even uses the sins of culpable people because we can never stand in the way of God.

In 2 Samuel 4, Barna and Rechab are free moral agents. They do what they want to do. They live out the intentions of their heart. They do exactly what they want, even when it's wicked, but they do it in a world that happens to be ruled by a God who is so sovereign, so powerful, so in charge, that even their wickedly intended actions will be used to achieve his righteous purposes.

Think about the implications of it with me. Think about it from Barna and Rechab's perspective.

Notice in the passage that they are absolutely responsible for their sin. Do you notice that?

God's sovereign purpose does not wipe out their moral responsibility for what they do. You know, Barna and Rechab can't stand before God and say, well, listen, you used what we did to make David king.

[22:06] That makes it all right, doesn't it? They can't say that, can they? At all. Not for a moment. Think about it like this. Let me try and illustrate it for a moment. Imagine for a moment that there is a giant concrete wall at the end of the road.

Okay? A giant, immovable, un-knocker-downable concrete wall at the end of the road. Okay? And there are signposts along the way showing you that it's there.

Yeah? There are markings on the road that say, you know, un-knockdownable concrete wall ahead. Yeah? Something like that. Right? So you know that it's there. And so you drive your car, but you totally ignore any of the signs.

You totally ignore the markings on the road. And you smash your car into the wall. And you scrape along the wall as it kind of pushes you along as your engine still runs and your foot is still on the gas.

The wall never gives way. But you crash into it and slide down like that. And the police turn up. And you get out of your car and they say, what happened here? And you say, well, listen, it didn't give way.

[23:12] So, you know, what's the problem? They say, no, no, we're going to charge you with driving without due care and attention. No, no, you can't charge me with driving without due care and attention because I didn't knock the wall down. I didn't knock the wall.

In fact, actually, if anything, the wall pushed me along and I scraped my car down it. So you can't accuse me of driving without due care and attention. Listen, of course they can, can't they?

The fact that the wall didn't give way is no excuse for your crashing into it. Yeah? And it's the same in 2 Samuel 4 with the sovereignty of God. There is in our world an un-knockdownable concrete wall of God's sovereign plan in Jesus Christ.

You can't knock it down. God will make his king the king. But it is not an excuse for you to behave in whatever way you like just because God's purposes will not be thwarted.

You can't use the fact that God's sovereign plan cannot be toppled as an excuse for you doing whatever you want to do and crashing into it and scraping alongside of it as it pushes you in the direction of his will and his purpose.

[24:21] And that's what's going on here in 2 Samuel 4. Let me say gently, but I'll try and be as clear as I can, but I think it's almost certain that there are people in this room who are living their lives like that.

You know, deep in your heart, that there is a concrete wall of God's will and purpose and plan. But you're driving headlong at it, crashing into it and scraping along it, hoping against hope that the fact that you haven't knocked the wall down might be sufficient excuse for crashing into it.

But it's not. It's not. You know, you know, don't you, that Jesus is the king. You know that Jesus rules and reigns. But you perhaps think, do you know what?

Let me just have a bit of fun before I do that, before I submit to him. God will let me off for that, won't he? Well, 2 Samuel 4 says, no, there is a wall of God's sovereign plan in Christ and it will not budge, but that's no excuse for driving headlong into it.

So surrender to the king and don't take it into your own hands and act in morally dubious ways like Raqqab and Barna. Now that brings us to the final step this morning, which is this.

[25:40] God rightly makes Jesus king even using wickedness. Wickedness. I hope as you stand back now from 2 Samuel chapter 4, there's something strangely familiar about the story. You've got wicked men killing an innocent man to bring redemption through God's anointed king.

And you know that story, don't you? That's what you should be thinking. I've heard this story before, Steve. I know this story. This is Jesus. Jesus is the innocent man who's killed by bloodthirsty men who are pursuing their own wicked ends, but under the sovereign hand of God end up providing righteous redemption for all who turn to God's king.

In other words, Jesus in 2 Samuel chapter 4 is greater than King David and greater than King Ish-bosheth. In 2 Samuel chapter 4, Ish-bosheth's death in weakness hands the throne to the righteous David, doesn't it?

Whereas in the New Testament, Jesus' death in weakness enthrones him as king, as God the Father in sovereign power installs the eternal son in human flesh to the throne of the universe by allowing him to die at the hands of wicked men.

Men whom he didn't fight, not because Jesus was asleep, but because he trusted in his father. And now that king, King Jesus, is ruling from heaven as all things are placed beneath his feet, knowing that if the wickedness of his execution on the cross, if all that could do was install him as king, then nothing in all of history will be able to stop God's plan.

[27:12] Jesus will be king, of that you can be sure. That's what we need to see as we finish, isn't it? This is the brilliance of 2 Samuel chapter 4. What you're getting in 2 Samuel 4 is a snippet of the story of history.

You know, we don't get to see the whole story of our own lives, do we? But we get to see it in David's life and we get in 2 Samuel 4 a snippet of the whole of history as God in sovereign power uses the wickedness of sinful men and women to rightly install his son, Jesus, as king, meaning nothing can stand in the way of his rule.

And more than that, it means that you and I, although we live in a world of chaos, we live in a world where God is sovereignly in charge and able to achieve his purposes in glory, even in the midst of

the chaos, even using the chaos.

See, think about what's going on here. You know, there probably should be a warning over this passage, shouldn't there? We're perhaps used to this, but this is a gruesome passage, right? What have you got here? You've got a murder in a bedroom, you've got a beheading, you've got a going on the run with someone's head in your backpack, you've got blood, death, madness, chaos. And that's our world, isn't it?

[28 : 25] You know, even in this room, we know what that world is like, don't we? We know what it's like to flee from nations where our lives are in danger. We know what it's like to live in the face of civil war played out in the front of our friends and our family.

We know what it's like to live in a city where there are knives on the street taking the lives of young people. We know especially what it's like, don't we? We know what it's like to have housing that's so uncertain and expensive that we don't know from one month to the next where we'll be living.

We know as families what it's like to have children wander away into sin and break our hearts. We know what it's like to have friends die. We know what it's like to have families that break apart. We know what it's like to have health that fails.

We know what it's like to have freeholds as a church that we might never own. And what does 2 Samuel 4 say to that? What's the message of 2 Samuel 4?

I'll tell you this, this is what the message is. It's this. In a verse, this is the message of 2 Samuel 4. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

[29 : 33] And 2 Samuel 4 tells you the truth of that verse in a story so that you can feel it as well as know it. Brothers and sisters, we need to see this, don't we?

Romans 8, verse 28 is not just a statement in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. It's the story of David's life. It's the story of the kingly rule of Jesus. And if you trust in Jesus Christ, it's your story too.

This is our story as West Kilburn Baptist Church as well, of God working even evil things for the good of Christ's glory in our lives. Praise him. Praise him.

Adam Ramsey has written a book called Truth on Fire and he puts it like this. It's a brilliant quote so I thought I'd just read it to you. Here it is as we finish. He says this, there are days in your future that are going to knock you to the ground.

There are situations on your horizon presently unknown to you that will expose you to just how not sovereign you are. Disappointment will make its mark. Despair will coil around your heart.

[30 : 38] Disease will rob your family. Death will strike without warning. Where will you look when the skies turn black? Here's where you look higher. In the same way the sun shines with uninterrupted constancy above every clouded sky so is Christ reigning over every difficult circumstance.

If God's ultimate in authority we needn't be held hostage by our anxieties because our lives are held securely in the hands of a loving father who is also the king.

Let me pray and then we'll sing together. Heavenly Father we thank you so much for the way that you teach us these great truths about who you are and what you're like and how you work in stories like 2 Samuel 4 which grab our attention and help us to feel the truth as well as know the truth.

We thank you Heavenly Father that you have rightly installed Jesus as king even through the wickedness of the cross. Thank you that wicked men and women calling out for his death on the cross nailing him hands and feet to that cross all they did was enthrone him as king of kings and lord of lords the one who rules and reigns forgives our sins and brings us into his glorious kingdom. Thank you for the great confidence that gives us that like David we need not fear because we know that you are so sovereign that all things work together for our good as we love you and are called to belong to you.

[32 : 35] So we praise your name for all that we've seen in 2 Samuel 4 and help us we pray to remember it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.