

Ish-Bosheth murdered

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[0 : 00] It's pretty brutal. We come really to a passage which have a couple of people who are under the rule of one leader, trying to turn on him and then follow a new leader, which is kind of the story of this week in our nation, you may have spotted.

But 2 Samuel 4 is a little more brutal than even our own UK politics. But before we get there, just before we get to this chapter, let's just fill you in on where we've got to, because if you haven't been with us from the beginning of 2 Samuel so far, you might think, well, what's this strange land that we've ended up in?

What's 2 Samuel 4 going on about? Well, here's the context. We've got two sides, the house of David or team of David and team of Saul, we said last week.

And David is on one side. He's king of Judah, one of the tribes in Israel. And Ish-bosheth's on the other side.

He's Saul's son, and he's been made king of the rest of Israel. And last week, this guy Abner actually started off life in team Saul.

[1 : 23] He was commander of Saul's army, but we saw him transfer over to King David. He had killed Asahel in a battle, and then in, not in a battle, Joab, to take revenge on Abner, who he didn't trust, then killed him.

So, if you thought this week was brutal, it's been brutal, actually, for a few chapters. So, that's where we've got to.

That's what the context is. And actually, if you turn to 2 Samuel 3, verse 1, I think this verse is a really good summary of what's going on in chapters 2 through to probably about chapter 5, really. 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.

Good to just have that in our minds as we now go through chapter 4. Chapter 4, verse 1, begins this way.

[2 : 34] When Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage. And all of Israel became alarmed.

Ish-bosheth has given up, we read at the beginning of this chapter. Literally, the words should be, he's lost heart.

And when a leader loses heart, loses the will to carry on, that can't be a good sign, can it?

We left last week seeing the opinion polls in Israel for David were sky high, whilst Ish-bosheth, it seems, he's completely behind.

But we do read this in verse 2. We read of a couple of people who seem to still be on Ish-bosheth's side.

[3 : 37] Now, Saul's son had two men who were leaders of raiding bands. One was named Ba'ana, and the other Rechab.

They were sons of Rimon, the Berethite, from the tribe of Benjamin. And Bereth is considered part of Benjamin. So here we go. I think I've spelt one of the names wrong.

But Rechab and Be'ana. They're there on Ish-bosheth's side, it seems. They're part of Benjamin.

But the significance of the tribe of Benjamin is that Saul's tribe. That's where he's from. That's where his family's from. That's why it's mentioned there in verse 2. But rather like things we've seen this week in our own politics, these two chaps aren't going to stay on this side for very long.

They're going to turn against their leader. And we see that beginning to take place in verse 5. Now Rechab and Be'ana, the sons of Rimon, the Berethite, set out for the house of Ish-bosheth.

[4 : 48] And they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noontime rest. The king is taking a nap. And they're there.

What are they going to do? Surely just leave him in peace. That's their king, isn't it? Verse 6. They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat.

And they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and his brother Be'ana slipped away. They snuck up on him in the middle of the day during his afternoon nap.

And they stabbed him. Their leader is dead. They have killed Ish-bosheth. Now, what are they going to do with that?

Are they going to appoint a successor in Ish-bosheth's place? Someone else in Saul's line? Well, I think that's why verse 4 is there.

[5 : 52] Verse 4 probably seems a bit random to us at first glance. But actually, this is who is left in Saul's family line to take over as king.

Verse 4. Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and his son 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.

A young boy and a young disabled boy. That's who's left. The writer of 2 Samuel is suggesting to us there is nobody left to rule for Team Saul.

Ish-bosheth was the last. And now he's gone. So appointing someone from Saul's family line is just not an option for Rechab and Beanna.

[6 : 59] So what are they going to do? Well, verse 7 gets more brutal. They had gone into the house whilst he was lying on his bed, in his bedroom.

After they stabbed him and killed him, they cut off his head, taking it with them. They traveled all night by the way of the Ereba. They cut off his head and they transport it like it's some sort of trophy.

Look, we've killed him. Look at us. And they take it to the other side, to Team David, King of Judah. Verse 8. They brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David. Here you go, 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.

They make it all sound wonderfully spiritual, don't they? The Lord's avenged you. The Lord is working for you.

[8 : 01] Here is Ish-bosheth's head. He is gone. The opposition is dead. What's David going to think? Does he agree with them?

Is this good? Verse 9. David answered Rechab and his brother Beanna, the sons of Rimmon, the Berethite. 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. Like, that was the reward I gave him for his news.

If that was what happened to that chap who came to him a few chapters ago. We saw that, I think, the first week in 2 Samuel. He said, I've killed Saul.

He was actually lying. He hadn't killed Saul at all. He was trying to claim to have done a great thing for David, killing the opposition. If the result was that he died, that was the justice for him.

[9 : 07] Well, what's going to happen to these guys? Verse 11. How much more? When wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house, on his own bed, should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you?

Gosh, these two men are probably rethinking what they've done. Was this really wise for us to kill the king in his nap?

Ish-bosheth hasn't deserved this. You took things into your own hands. David is basically saying, now away was ye. And here's what happens. Verse 12.

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. Quite the story, isn't it?

Quite the ending. But what do we do with all this? How's this going to help us in the year 2026? How's this going to help us to live the Christian life?

[10 : 11] How's this going to help us to follow Jesus this week? That's what I was asking myself through the week. Well, here is where I've got to. I'm so sorry about more spelling mistakes.

But a God-honoring murder. A God-honoring murder. It's interesting to see, isn't it, in verse 8, as we notice, how they make this claim about Ish-bosheth, who they've killed, to be a God thing.

This day the Lord has avenged my Lord, the king, against Saul and his offspring. Look, this is good news, David. He's dead.

You can take the rest of the nation. There's no longer any king over the rest of Israel. No barriers to you ruling over them. We've done the Lord's work for you.

After all, Saul and his family, they've been against you for years, haven't they? Is this not a good thing we've done? But I'd like to ask them, is it really?

[11:18] Is it really the Lord's will for you to go into the king's house whilst he's having an app and kill him? Is that what God wants from you? Is not God's law very clear about murder?

You shall not murder? Is it? Let's face it. That's what you guys have done. And yet they see it as a good thing. One commentator I was reading this week said, it is the height of the presumption for the perpetrator of the wickedness to present his evil deed as a gift from God.

And that's really what they're trying to do, isn't it? Here's the head. It's a gift. It's a gift of God to you, David.

But David's reaction, I think, makes very clear this is not honoring to the Lord at all. Not honoring to the Lord at all. A reminder of verse 11. A bit like his response to Joab, who had killed Abner so foolishly.

And David said to Joab, this kingdom isn't to be a kingdom built on the shedding of innocent blood. And so David is making that clear to these guys too.

[13:00] That's not what my kingdom is about. So how dare they justify it as a God-honoring act? They want a pat on the back.

Well done, guys. That's what they want. They want to be celebrated for their sin. But this isn't to be celebrated.

It's an act of sin, not an act of success. And so the challenge for us is I wonder if we ever try to make out that things we are doing a good God things when actually deep down we know they're not right.

Try and make up godly excuses for sinful behavior. And yet the Bible's clear.

James writes, So we cannot say, We cannot say that the Lord says it's okay for me to complain at church about that fellow Christian who just annoys me.

[14:36] Nor can we really, under the disguise of prayer, try and spread some gossip about someone.

Say, I think you ought to pray for Jim. His breath is terribly smelly. Sat next to him all through that service. It was awful. Show me the verse in the Bible where it says it's okay to grumble and complain about one another.

Show me the verse in the Bible where it says it's okay to spread holy gossip. Show me the verse in the Bible where it tells me it's okay to lie.

Show me the verse in the Bible where it says it's okay to murder someone in their afternoon nap. It's not okay.

God's kingdom is to be a place of righteousness, not where sinful success is praise. So do we want to be walking in God's ways?

[15:52] Do we want to be honoring Him? Even if it means we have to say sort of no to short-term gains and successes.

This was Beanna and Rechab trying to take a shortcut to ending Ish-bosheth's reign, wasn't it? Do we want to walk in God's ways or do we want to cover up our own evil desires and evil ways with, Oh, this is actually me honoring God?

It's a challenge. Secondly, we see here the king's justice. The king's justice. We left chapter 3 with the king failing to act justly with Joab.

That's David. Didn't act justly with Joab as he should have done. David is inconsistent, but here, at least, he does model what good justice in God's kingdom should look like.

Verse 12. Here's the justice. 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.

[17:10] When I was thinking about justice, I reminded myself of this little statue thing outside the old Bailey courts in London.

Lady justice holding scales in one hand and a sword in the other. Scales to sort of weigh up the evidence. Justice and sword representing the authority of the state to invoke a just sentence.

And David here is sort of doing that. He's got the scales in one hand, hearing and seeing what they have done. Weighing up the evidence before him, and then he's got the sword in another, and he's ready to execute justice as the king given authority to do so by the Lord.

And the justice that we see is these two men, they have their hands and their feet cut off.

That's the justice given out for men who have, with their hands, cut off their head and stabbed the king.

[18 : 27] And with their feet, with their feet, they carried Ish-bosheth's head like it was a trophy. Their hands and their feet, they're cut off.

This is the king's justice in action. And that whole cutting off of hands and feet is brutal, isn't it? Brutal punishment. We're probably not particularly enjoying reading that. But actually it's a real big illustration of the just punishment that our sin deserves.

Remember the words of Jesus as he was talking about sin in the Sermon on the Mount. This is from Matthew chapter 5.

If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

[19 : 31] Brutal words. He's not literally saying, do cut off your hand and throw it away. Otherwise, I don't think any of us would have any hands. But no, it's saying this is how serious sin is.

If you sin, that's worthy of the just punishment of the Lord. It's better to deal brutally with it now rather than face God's punishment.

And in terms of murder, we think of it like this, don't we, in this chapter as someone killing someone else.

But Jesus also talks about murder in the Sermon on the Mount. You've heard it was said to people long ago, you shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, Raka is answerable to the court.

[20 : 40] Or anyone who says, you fool, will be in danger of the fire of hell. Gosh, that goes deep, doesn't it? Murder in Jesus' eyes is far more than just that killing, just what 2 Samuel 4 is talking about.

Calling someone a fool. Harboring hatred towards someone else. And so that leaves us all before the Lord, the great King of all the world.

It leaves us standing guilty before Him in terms of His justice. We stand guilty before Him wearing sort of dirty clothes.

We've done wrong, we've sinned. And if we're wearing dirty clothes, you're not fit to stand before a king on His throne, are you? And so we praise God for the one who spoke those words in Matthew 5.

The Lord Jesus Christ. The one who knew no sin. Who wore spotless clothes. And yet He became sin for us.

[22 : 02] He took our dirty clothes on the cross. Our sin. And He bore that just punishment in our place.

He took God's anger, righteous justice, wrath on Himself. So that we don't have to face it.

And so all of us before God, if we're trusting in Jesus and the work that He has done. If we've called on Him and said, please save me, please forgive me my sin.

No longer do we stand wearing dirty clothes before the throne of God. We stand wearing spotless, clean clothes because we're dressed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that wonderful? Now in terms of 2 Samuel 4. These guys who cut off Saul's head really thought they knew the way forward for David.

[23 : 11] They thought they'd take things into their own hands. Kill a man. But actually now they're facing the king's rightful justice. But what about David in all this?

We see His justice being executed. But we also see something else quite remarkable, I think. We see where His trust is.

Verse 9. After it had been presented with the head of Ish-bosheth, David answered them, David was promised the throne of Israel by the Lord.

But he never ever tried to force his way to it. We've seen in 1 Samuel, he's had opportunities to kill Saul. To get rid of Saul.

But his trust was always in God. Knowing that in God's right timing, he would get to the throne.

[24 : 26] We see his trust elsewhere. Remember when he faced the giant Goliath, an impossibility for little David to kill the giants.

But his trust was in God, knowing this was an impossibility that he faced. And yet his trust in the Lord to fight for him, brought Goliath down.

David was a king with a trust in the Lord to deliver him. David was a king who was content with waiting upon the Lord. Psalm 40, David writes, I waited patiently for the Lord.

Waited patiently in distress. That's not waiting sort of a day or so for something to happen.

Sustained waiting. And in terms of these chapters in Samuel, years are going by before he gets to the throne of all Israel.

See, God's timetable is not the same as ours. He doesn't often work as speedily as we would like, does he?

[25 : 50] That can be really hard. We see it in the life of Jesus. We see patient waiting in the life of Jesus, David's greatest son, the great King Jesus.

In his temptations, remember, Satan was trying to urge him to take a shortcut to power without all the suffering on the cross.

And yet Jesus said no. And then it wasn't, that was at the beginning of his ministry, what, three years later? Then he faced the cross. He waited to ascend the throne.

And he did not do it via a shortcut. He did it by enduring awful suffering. Unimaginable pain and suffering.

He endured for us at the cross. So that we might have our sin paid for. So that we can wear those spotless clothes of righteousness. So that we can know a place in God's forever kingdom.

[26 : 55] So we see David's trust in the King. He's content to wait. We see that in the Lord Jesus. What about in us? It's been, it's a sad day for us, saying goodbye to David.

Without trying to embarrass him in any way, I've seen in him over these last few months a patient trust in the Lord to direct his future. Patiently waiting upon him, praying to make his future clear.

Waiting on the Lord can mean for us. Things don't go the way we would choose, expect, dream.

But you know, he is a wonderful God. He is a wonderful king. A king who could justly condemn us to hell and yet by his mercy and grace, we see in him a king who has laid down his throne to win life for us.

He's picked us up. He's redeemed us. He's seated us in heavenly places. And he promises he will work for our goods and for his glory.

[28 : 27] And so we need to patiently trust. We need to patiently wait on him like David does.

for he will deliver us out of every trouble. He will, through every dark valley we face, be beside us.

And one day he will bring us safely to himself. And we will see him seated on his throne. And we will praise our king forever.

We've seen, we've questioned this morning, is this a God-honoring murder? No. It's a challenge to us. And we've seen the king's right justice.

And we've also seen the king's remarkable trust. We're going to respond in a moment by singing a song.

[29 : 31] Lord, be my vision, which ends high king of heaven after victory won. May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun. Heart of my own heart, whatever before, still be my vision, O ruler of all.

We want the Lord to be the one we're looking to, the one we're trusting in throughout all of our lives. So as we sing, Be Thou My Vision, let that be our prayer.