

Walk in his way: The way of trust

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[0 : 00] We've been thinking in this part of the service about questions people ask Jesus.! We're going to continue asking a question today, but not one asked by Jesus.

Instead, we're going to go into the Old Testament and ask a question about family relationships.

And our question is this, why would a son rebel against his father?

Now, I'm hasten to add that this is not from my own personal experience, but this is coming rather from King David. There he is. Now, we're going to ask our question, explore a little bit of the background, and begin to answer the question, and we're going to answer it more fully also later in the service, because the story we're talking about just now relates to the psalm we're going to be looking at later.

So this is just setting the scene a little bit. At this point in David's life, he's established as the king. He's been crowned at Hebron. He's defeated the Philistine army. He's brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem and danced with joy in the streets as it entered the city.

We read in 2 Samuel 7, And sometime later then we have the story of Bathsheba and the birth of Solomon.

[1 : 23] We know that David, as we know, of course, that David had more than one wife, and he also had another son called Absalom with his wife, Maka. And we read first about Absalom in 2 Samuel 13.

Now, Absalom's sister, Temur, is attacked, and Absalom feels that King David could have done a bit more to catch the attacker, whose name was Ammon, who also happened to be Absalom's half-brother.

So Absalom decides it's time to kill Ammon and succeeds in doing that, but then must flee to avoid being charged with murder.

This is whistling through quite a few chapters in 2 Samuel. Eventually, Absalom gets to come back. David won't have him back in the city, but eventually they prevail on him and he allows them back, but David won't let him come and see him.

Although, after a little while, he eventually does. And then here comes the rebellious son part of the story. Absalom is very ambitious, and he wanted to be king.

[2 : 31] So he started to undermine David and eventually gathered a great number of people together and had them proclaim him king. David then is forced to flee in the desert and is hunted for a while, but God is with him and eventually is able to go back to Jerusalem and deal with these rebellious people who supported Absalom over him.

Unfortunately for Absalom, you might be familiar with this part of the story, he flees the city on horseback, but he rides under a tree, and he's got very long hair, and his hair gets tangled in the branches, and the horse keeps going and he gets hanging by his hair from these branches. It's not something I could really identify with personally, but there's a really, I mean, just every now and again you read something, a really lovely way of saying something, and it says in 2 Samuel 18 that Absalom was suspended between heaven and earth.

I thought that was a really great way of putting it anyway. So a man called Joab found him, and then while he was hanging there unfortunately, he stabbed him with three different javelins, and gives you that little detail that the Bible also sometimes gives you why you had to say three javelins, I don't know, but maybe there is a reason, but anyway, he's definitely dead after that.

So as I said earlier, we're going to have another look at this story, and the psalm that David wrote, we're going to be talking about later, while he was in the desert, while he had to flee Absalom, and what we can learn from David's reaction to this very sudden reversal that he had.

[4 : 05] And our psalm that we're going to read later, the first verse says, Oh God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you. With everything that happened to David, he turned to God, the God that he knows so well and prays.

Throughout the story, we see David's sorrow, of course, at the rebellion of Absalom. But David, of course, David had a lot of resources available to him. There were a lot of people who do whatever he asked, and he was clearly a very intelligent person, as we know from reading all his stories. So he probably could have come up with lots of ideas to deal with this situation, and all these things he did do eventually that he needed to do, but none of them were the thing that he did first. The first thing David did was pray. Now that can seem hard for us, because sometimes prayer can seem quite passive. You're just talking to God, and you don't feel like you're doing anything to resolve your situation.

But David's example shows us that's not the case, and Jesus' example shows us the same. He often went apart from his friends as we read in the Gospels to pray. We're going to think a bit more, as I said, about David and how he reacted to his situation, and how his trust in God characterised how he reacted, and how he wrote this psalm and what he wrote in it.

[5 : 19] But in the meantime, we're going to join together in singing our next hymn, What a Friend We Have in Jesus. Let's share together. Let's share together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.

May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Just after I stopped working at Teen Ranch up in Perthshire, I had the opportunity to go out to Teen Ranch in Australia to fill in for someone who had to take some time off, and that person and I did the same job, and so I was very happy to go and fill in for him for a while.

While I was there, I visited Darwin, which, as you know, you might know is right up in the north, and as a plane flew over the centre of the country, all you could see was desert.

Now, of course, Australia is a big place. It's bigger than Europe, I think, or almost as big as Europe, and huge parts of it are desert and not really fit for human life. Now, if we were dropped into that desert with nothing around us but sand, we would soon feel that we were in trouble.

[6 : 37] Maybe if we had Bear Grylls or Ray Mears or someone with us, we might have a chance. But on our own, we probably wouldn't last long. No food, no water, not even a good Wi-Fi signal.

Maybe if we'd watched a David Attenborough documentary about animal life in the desert, we would know that at least on one level there was some kind of life around us, even though we wouldn't be able to see it, most likely.

But no matter who we had around us or what we knew in our heads, what I suspect would be very obvious is that desert is not an easy place for people to live. As we saw earlier, David was forced to flee from Jerusalem and go into hiding.

2 Samuel 15 describes the place he went to as a wilderness. And the psalm we have read today, as we saw earlier, is the one that he wrote at this time. There's lament and sorrow, but also trust and hope, as we'll see.

And we saw that as we looked at the first part of verse 1 earlier. David's first instinct is to turn to God in prayer. But as we look at the rest of verse 1, we see the lament.

[7 : 46] But this is not a lament of hopelessness.

One person described this verse, especially where it says, earnestly I seek you, as having the quality of a close friend, someone he's familiar with and in whom he has complete trust.

Of course, he's in sorrow for his situation and for the actions of his son. But he's not written these words as one who stands alone in the middle of the desert, rather as one who knows in difficult times that his good friend walks with him.

As we look at verse 2, we're led even further into our thought that David's first instinct in time of difficulty is to turn to God. So I've looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

For David, this just follows. His flesh faints. He's in a dry and weary land. There's no water. So he looks to God and beholds his glory. Now we're probably more familiar with this idea in our daily lives than we realise.

[9 : 01] There will be some things that happen and your mind immediately goes to the same place or person. A smell or a sound, a name, or catching sight of something all takes us straight away to

something familiar.

It's not even a conscious thought, usually more like a reflex. And David's reflex, when he's in trouble, is to pray and call out to God. But this can't have been something that happened to him from day one.

It was something he had to work at as he grew in his relationship with this God who had chosen him. Often when we look back at something in our lives, we can see certain points where if a different small decision had been made, things would have turned out very differently.

We can reflect and give thanks to God because we know that he was guiding us to end up in this place or that. That sort of reflection grows our trust in God and forms the basis for further trust in the future.

David saw God work in his life in lots of dramatic circumstances. Our lives may not be as exciting and maybe we can be thankful for that, but we can see God's faithfulness to us as David did.

[10:14] We know about David because the story is in God's word, but God has worked in the lives of people just as he did with David for countless generations. And we know that because we all sit here today as examples of that, of God working in our lives.

And we can prayerfully and thankfully recount God's work in our lives and know that each of these times has brought us closer to God. This also helps us to develop that reaction David had of turning to God as our first instinct.

David goes on in the next verse to make a startling statement for someone who is a king and lives in a palace surrounded by people to cater to his every need.

He says, but your steadfast love is better than life. My lips will praise you. What prompted David to say something like that? We've already seen that David's relationship with God was such that his first thought was always to turn to God.

And David has seen God's faithfulness as he was anointed ahead of his brothers because God looked on the outward appearance and not on the heart, but not, I'm sorry, not on the outward appearance but on the heart.

[11:27] As a young boy, he stood in front of a nine foot giant and said, you come with sword and spear but I come in the name of the Lord of hosts. He was faithful when he had opportunities to kill Saul who was king before him but trusted in God to deal with him.

And as king, he was guided by God to defeat the enemies of his people and settle in the land into a time of peace. We could go on with different stories. We know there's loads of great stories about David's life but they all serve to demonstrate the faithfulness of the God that David trusted and show us ample basis for that trust.

So when David says your steadfast love is better than life, we know it comes from experience after experience. The other important thing for us to remember here is that as far as David knew, he'd lost his throne.

Maybe he trusted that God would get it back for him sometime but at this point he was out of his palace, out of his capital and on the run from his own son who wanted to kill him and still he looks to God and says, your steadfast love is better than life.

Now David sets a high bar here because that leads us to ask the same question. Your steadfast love is better than what? And that is a good question because throughout God's word we read that God wants to be first.

[12:48] Right from the Ten Commandments, through all the laws he gave to Moses, the messages from his prophets, when the people were being so unfaithful. The answer to the question is your steadfast love is better than anything.

And that's what David meant when he said it's better than life, the most precious thing we have. Now I wonder if there's a little note of caution going off in the back of your head or a slightly uncomfortable feeling.

We can be a bit uneasy sometimes about people who are fanatical and roll out for something which seems to be what this verse is suggesting. Now I wonder if you know who on your street will be first to put up their Christmas tree.

Maybe it's you. Some people love Christmas so much that they can't wait to start. They love how their house looks when it's decorated so they get going nice and early. When our kids were young we used to walk around the streets where we live week by week and as we went through November into December we'd always be amazed at the number of houses who put their decorations up quite

early or early as I thought about it anyway.

And of course in our family we have a birthday right at the end of November so there's no Christmas still after that. But there is a man who's called Mr. Christmas. You may have heard of him. at least claims to have celebrated Christmas every day since 1993.

[14:08] You can get your head around that. He even appeared in a Marks & Spencer commercial for advertising Christmas puddings in 1999. A bit strange maybe you're thinking that.

But clearly his life revolves around Christmas and Christmas dinner. Not very healthy I wouldn't think. That's what satisfies him but it's a bit hard for the rest of us to understand living like that maybe.

An Australian friend told me once that on his travels around Brittany he'd seen that people were a little bit more measured sometimes hard to get excited about things. He put it down to the weather because as he saw our weather was never too cold or too hot maybe he should have come here today.

But he thought that that created a national temperament apart from that being a gross generalisation maybe he did have a little bit of a point only a little bit maybe there is something about being British or Scottish that makes us lean away from people who are fanatical about something.

It would certainly be hard to imagine the type of political rallies we've been seeing in the recent United States elections happening here. We don't tend to idolise our politicians maybe the opposite.

[15:19] You can certainly maybe think of a small number of people you admire under specific circumstances but nothing like the blind adoration that we've seen in the US. Of course there are exceptions.

A small number of people can be devoted to our political leader but generally we are a little bit cynical. Perhaps we're too ready to think that as soon as we commit to something it will all go wrong.

How many times have you planned a barbecue and said now that we've bought the food it will probably rain? Maybe some people are more inclined to optimism than us and maybe in some places in the world people are more inclined to pessimism or as we might think of it being realistic. So for culturally or by temperament people who don't find it easy to say your steadfast love is better than life then we're in a difficult spot. Perhaps we're more likely to say your steadfast love is better than well it depends.

But thankfully God gets us out of that pickle because none of this is meant to be done by us alone. That brings us to verse 7 and 8. For you have been my help in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy my soul clings to you your right hand upholds me.

[16:33] Let's just remember again where David was and why he was there out in the desert away from his home in danger for his life and here he is talking about joy. David's trust in God allowed him to find joy even in his circumstances.

We've already seen how that might come about in David's life at that time because of his close relationship with God and his reflex to turn to God at all times. So maybe we're a bit doubtful maybe we're a bit worried maybe we're thinking this is all good for other people but I don't find this sort of thing easy.

But David says at the start of 7 verse 7 you have been my help and at the end of verse 8 your right hand upholds me. The right hand has a lot of symbolic relevance in the Bible it signifies God's strength and ability to help.

In other words God is able to keep his promises not only because he always has but because he is strong enough. If we have a longing to say as David did your steadfast love is better than life and are not sure that we can do it then that's correct.

We can't do it and God isn't asking us to do it he's saying that he will give us the strength to enable us to do it. What David says here we find elsewhere in the Bible Paul summarizes it really well in 2 Corinthians 12 9 But he said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

[18:09] Paul makes it clear that it's in our weakness that the power of God through Jesus can be at work in our lives. All we do as followers of Jesus is done through the power of God so if we feel too weak that's good if we feel we don't have the strength to say your steadfast love is better than life that's fine because God can then work through you to grow and draw closer to him and to live

the life that he wants us to do.

Our weakness can never outstrip God's power. David had God's promise that look towards Jesus the person and his family that would sit on the throne forever but we have the testimony of Jesus who lived and taught and showed us a way to the Father and through his sacrificial death on the cross and his glorious resurrection.

That's the power we live in. Jesus is the one who opened up a way for us to know God and who sent the Holy Spirit to live and work in us and enabled us to do the things that Jesus taught.

Your steadfast love is better than life. That can be true for us in our weakness and in the power of Jesus willingly given in his perfect love. Let's surrender ourselves to that truth and see how God will work in us and grow us then see the difference that we'll make in our lives and in the lives of the people around us.

Let's pray. Lord, we could never say that your steadfast love is better than life without your strength and power within us. Thank you that you give us that power through Jesus who lived and died and rose again so we could know you and your work in our lives.

[19 : 48] Help us to give ourselves to you and thank you for all the blessing that will follow. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.