

War and Civil War

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Almighty God, we pray now that your word would be a rule and guide, your Holy Spirit may be our teacher, and your greater glory would be our supreme concern, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Please sit down. Well, please open your Bibles at 2 Samuel 20 on page 272 and 273.

You'll find it helpful if you're a visitor to follow along the story. While you're finding it at the 9 o'clock service, the earlier service, when Dan had the children around and he asked them, what have you done that's special this morning, one young girl who was very insistent called out that this morning she'd had her ears pierced.

Dan was looking for a Father's Day story, and instead he got an ear piercing, which wasn't quite what he was after. And I often find that with the Bible, and particularly passages like this.

This is not exactly perhaps what we expected. So I went into Dan's office and I found this magazine, The Common Ground. Actually, I didn't find it in Dan's office, although there is a photograph of Dan on the front.

[1 : 25] It's advertising the next Walk for Peace, which is next Sunday, June 30th. I think it's in the afternoon downtown here in Vancouver. This is the largest peace event in Canada.

It started 30 years ago, and 170 groups gather together in their desire for peace. And in the magazine, in the editorial, one of the founders of the Walk for Peace says that there is a great urge to connect in person, to feel our shared spirit for peace, to co-create our vision for a more peaceful world, to truly find common ground for peace.

And there's something about that, I think, that captures a desire that we all have, not just for inner peace, but to live in a world that's marked by integrity and harmony, by what's right, by justice, by security.

And of course, all these ideas echo the big Bible word for peace, which is the word shalom. We keep coming across it in 1 and 2 Samuel. Shalom peace.

And I just give this back to Dan, if I can. Now, every time I use the word peace in the sermon today, I mean by it the shalom peace.

[2 : 48] This is the big Hebrew word. It's not just the absence of war. It's not just inner peace. It means harmony with one another. It means enjoying harmony and security with God.

Wholeness. Wholeness with creation. Wholeness with God. It means salvation. And the books of Samuel are about how is God going to bring that peace into our world?

The way in which he's going to do it is by bringing his kingdom, the kingdom of God, through the king of God. Establishing his kingdom by establishing his king, the Messiah.

And as we've read through these chapters, and particularly as we come to the end of the 2 Samuel, what the writers are doing is they are preparing us for Jesus.

They are making us long for the coming of Jesus. Our hopes were raised pretty high with David, weren't they? God's choice rested on him. And when he came into his throne, he didn't take it by force.

[3 : 49] He suffered to enter into his rule. And when he takes the throne, his ambition is for God. And it's all good. The ark comes into Jerusalem. And he promises, God promises to establish a throne forever.

But 2 Samuel has two summaries of David's life and work. One at the end of the first half of his life and one at the end of the second. So if you keep your Bible open, but turn to the bulletin sheet.

And on the front page of the bulletin sheet, I've written the two summaries out there. The first summary comes at the end of chapter 8.

And there are two things we note. I've just written it straight down the page there. This is quoted out of the text. Two things you notice. The first is David reigned over all Israel and David administered justice and equity to his people.

And at the end, David's sons were his priests. Now, justice and equity are not just the legal fairness, you know, judges making right decisions.

[4 : 56] Justice and it's literally rightness. These are qualities of God himself. And in Samuel, they are pictures of loving kindness, of restoration, of establishing shalom.

In fact, the very next story in chapter 9, you remember about Mephibosheth, the man who is lame, who is related to David's mortal enemy. David does an act of wonderful kindness to him.

He looks after him and invites him to come and share his table, the royal table, for the rest of his life. And so when we finish chapter 8, it's a picture of shalom blessing, a united and happy people, under a Messiah, who's acting like a shepherd of God, trying to bring shalom.

But when we get to chapter 20, this is the second summary report on David's life. And let me just push the pause button for a second. Chapter 20 is kind of the end of the narrative.

In 21 to the end, which we're going to look at in the next couple of weeks, what the writer does, he takes us way higher and looks back over David's reign and forward to the life of Jesus in a most remarkable way.

[6 : 11] But this is kind of how, this is the end of the narrative. And so the second summary, which is a summary of the second half of David's life and rule, are the last verses in Samuel 20.

Is that clear? Everyone with me? If you're not, just put your hand up. If you don't want to be, put your hand up. No, no. Now there are two things you notice about this summary.

It's very different than summary in chapter 8. The first thing you notice is, and most striking, there's a complete vacuum of David ruling in peace and rightness.

It's just not there. David's grip on power is fragile. The kingdom is fragile and his rule is no longer marked by righteousness and justice and shepherd love. The practice of seeking God before he made big decisions and hearing God's voice, it's just not there.

They're very worrying that he started well and he's finishing so poorly. And all mention of his sons are gone, you see at the bottom of the page. And the reason for that is that since chapter 11, everything has gone downhill.

[7 : 17] If you're here for the first time, I just remind, just fly over this. In chapter 11, at the height of his success, David decided to take time away from serving God and he commits adultery with Bathsheba.

He has Bathsheba's husband murdered. And then in his own family, as this sin sort of plays out, he becomes passive. So when this first son rapes his half-sister, David does nothing.

When the second in line to the throne murders first son, David does nothing. When the first son goes into exile and then comes back into Jerusalem, David does nothing.

When Absalom conspires against his father David and creates a revolt, David does nothing. I mean, Absalom goes off and crowns himself king and raises an army. He does nothing.

It's a very sort of West Coast fatherly thing that we've got going on here. David is no longer ruling in justice and equity. And the second thing we see about this summary is the question, what is it that fills the vacuum of justice and rightness?

[8 : 24] And it is power and might. You see, Joab in the first list was over the army. Now he's in command of all the army. He's got a vice-like grip on the army.

There's a unity there, but it's based on fear. And in verse 24, you weren't shocked probably as we read this verse, but in verse 24, we have the first mention of forced labor.

This is a pagan practice, forced labor. This is what Pharaoh did to the Israelites in Egypt. And it's an ominous mention because in 1 Kings, which is the next book in the Bible, in 2 Kings, this becomes the reason that blows the kingdom apart and the kingdom splits and it leads in the end to exile.

So here is the summary of the second half of David's life. And these two things, the absence of justice and rightness and the power politics that fill the vacuum are pictured for us in chapter 20.

That's why I'm laboring this summary. And so I've got two main points. The first is the vacuum of justice and righteousness. And that is the first part of the chapter.

[9 : 37] So we're looking at the vacuum of justice and righteousness. And there are two very sad short stories that begin the chapter. The first is the rebellion of Sheba, verses 1 and 2.

Context, David had fled before Absalom, fled out of Jerusalem with his men. The battle is over. His commander, Joab, had executed his son Absalom.

And so David has now crossed the Jordan. He's marching back up to Jerusalem. But if you were here last week, you'll know at the end of chapter 19 had a very nasty ending. David sets up a stupid competition between the men of the north and the men of the south.

And now Bikri's rebellion demonstrates something of the paper-thin commitment that Israel, the men of the north, have to him as their Messiah. The very silliness and foolishness of the competition creates dry tinder for this rebellion.

And this time, in verse 1, it comes from a man called Sheba, and he's called a worthless man. It's not a statement of his self-esteem. Worthless is a Bible word in the Proverbs.

[10 : 43] To be worthless is to be worse than a fool. A fool doesn't listen to anyone, but a worthless man not only doesn't listen to anyone, but thinks that he is wise in his own eyes.

More ominously, he comes from the tribe of Benjamin, Saul's tribe. And he blows the trumpet, and in verse 1, he calls out, we have no portion in David, no inheritance to the sons of Jesse, every man to his tents.

So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan up the hill to Jerusalem.

And we now know how fragile David's rule is and how weak the kingdom is. And it has come as a direct result of David's sin and then his failure to deal with his sons.

Just before I completely stop mentioning this, it's very interesting how David's failure to deal with his sons puts the kingdom at risk. If you keep your finger in 2 Samuel 20 and turn to the first chapter of 1 Kings, which is three pages to the right, there's a very interesting mention.

[11 : 55] The next in line to the throne after Absalom is Adonijah. And in verse 5 of 1 Kings 1, Adonijah tries to take the kingdom by force from his father again.

Deja vu. And in verse 6, what's the reason? David, his father, had never at any time displeased him by asking, why have you done thus and so? He was also a very handsome man and he was born next after Absalom.

He never disciplined him. He never said, why are you doing that? It seemed like David was incapable of saying no to his sons. It's the last time I'm going to mention it.

Let's go back to chapter 20. So here is the Sheba's rebellion and Sheba's sin. Well, he's rejecting God's chosen Messiah.

And the kingdom is in crisis because of the vacuum of rightness and justice. That's the first little story. The second little story deals with the concubines in verse 3.

[12 : 56] The first thing that David must do when he comes back into the city of Jerusalem is to deal with the 10 women he left, the 10 concubines he left at the mercy of Absalom.

Despite God's absolutely clear warnings about this earlier in the Bible, David shows how easy it is to become a king like the nation's roundabout.

And we learned, remember back in chapter 5, he took multiple wives and 10 concubines. Now using the women of Israel as a harem is contemptible in itself.

What's worse is that when he fled from Jerusalem he left these women exposing them to rape by Absalom. David's inaction in the face of Absalom compounds their suffering, their exploitation, their degradation.

Until the end, their lives are a living testimony to David's sin and foolishness. And the writer thinks this is so important he puts it as the first thing David must do as he comes back into Jerusalem.

[14 : 09] And what does David do? Verse 3, he comes to his house, he takes the 10 concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them but he did not go into them.

So they were shut up until the day of their death living as if in widowhood. He gives them permanent accommodation and permanent care. He provides food and a form of security, some form of care for these traumatised women and he no longer uses them for sex.

And I don't know, it may be a sign of David's repentance, we're not told. He's certainly distancing himself from this pagan practice and he's acting differently from Absalom. At best you can say he's trying to ameliorate the harm that his actions have brought to these women.

But it's all too little, too late. His provision and protection amount to nothing more than a lifetime prison sentence. He is unable to provide true shalom peace for these women.

And it's a very sad statement on the kingdom of God which is meant to be the place of blessing and the place of protection and the place of human flourishing and wholeness and life with God.

[15 : 23] The place where things are put right. There is a vacuum of justice and rightness, there's a vacuum of shalom because of David's own failing. That's the first thing we see.

The second thing we see is what fills the gap and it's power politics and that's the rest of the chapter. Now, if you're with us for the first time, I want to introduce you to Joab, the commander of the army.

It's a bit hard to describe Joab. He's kind of a combination of Rambo, Achilles and Arnold Schwarzenegger before 1987.

He is the perfect guy to clean up a mess. He's an expert at black ops, covert operations with extreme prejudice I think the movies call it. Conscience is not a problem to him and he gives the king plenty of plausible deniability.

He was the commander of the army of David but David fired him in chapter 19 and replaced him with a massa who was a known traitor.

[16 : 30] It was a stupid decision. And the rest of chapter 20 give us two incidents with Joab and as Dan said to the children, parental guidance is recommended.

This is about war and gore. It's the opposite of shalom. That's the picture we're meant to get. And I often find when we're in church and someone reads a passage like this in the Bible reading and we end it by saying this is the word of the Lord and we all heartily say thanks be to God.

I'm not sure whether it's because we're not there or we're not preaching or I'm not. So the first episode I've called Joab stops a massa in his tracks verses 4 to 13.

David knows how dangerous Sheba's rebellion is and so he gets a massa his new general and he says to him get the army together in three days. In verse 5 a massa deliberately disobeys David.

His loyalty to the Messiah is also paper thin. We don't know why. And for the first time David acknowledges the devastation left by Absalom verse 6. So he doesn't turn to Joab David turns to Abishai who's Joab's brother and he says now Sheba the son of Bichbi will do us more harm than Absalom.

[17 : 54] Take your Lord's servants and pursue him lest he get himself to fortified cities and escape from us. And then in verse 7 the writer the narrator makes a very interesting shift.

David thinks of his army as his servants but the narrator calls them Joab's men. Very interesting. It's not a slip of a pen.

These men are fiercely loyal to Joab. It's as though Joab has built his own little empire in the military. And away they go chasing after Sheba.

And what happens? Well on their way they just happen to bump into a massa. And I don't know why is a massa chasing them?

I don't know what's going on. Joab pretends to be a massa's friend and he greets him as a friend but he's got a sword strategically placed under his robe.

[18 : 54] And as a massa comes to Joab and gives him a hug, faster than you can say Judas, Joab skewers him with his sword with all his might and if you want to look at the grisly details there in verse 10.

It's a dirty deed. It's full of treachery. It's the opposite of Shalom. He's treating a member of the people of God as though he were an enemy combatant.

And if you are an alert reader and you've read through 1 and 2 Samuel, you'll know this has happened before. This is exactly what Joab did to Abner who was the previous commander of the army of Israel.

Now, the thing about Joab is that he looks like he's fiercely loyal to the kingdom of God and to the king of God but he's quite happy to disobey any of the Ten Commandments so long as it gets the job done.

He's like the apostle Peter. You remember when they came to arrest Jesus, Peter takes out a sword and chops off someone's ear as though that somehow is going to defend Jesus and protect the kingdom of God.

[20 : 03] And history is littered with examples of Christians who we think we're doing God's work, we just don't do it God's way because we keep wanting the kingdom of God to conform to the way we think, to act the way we would act.

And whenever we take things into our own hands but we do things in a way that doesn't please God, it has grisly results. And you're never really sure with Joab.

He looks like he's acting in the king's interests or is it that the king's interests happen to align with his? Because both Amasa and Abner were rivals of Joab for the top job in the army.

They threatened his control on the military and both of them he murders in cold blood. No doubt he had many justifications for it. Very grey decision.

But it's merciless murder. And although I think we would prefer to look away from this passage, the text won't let us.

[21 : 06] And for three more verses, Amasa's body lies in the centre of the road, bleeding to death, and one of Joab's men uses the body as a sort of a test of loyalty to Joab.

You see verse 11? He stands by the body and he said, whoever favours Joab and whoever's for David, let him follow Joab. You see, he's attaching David as support for Joab's political ambitions.

If you really love the kingdom of God, you're going to follow this guy. Now, of course, we are far more sophisticated and subtle than this, aren't we? And yet, don't we follow Joab's footsteps when we say we care about the kingdom of God, but actually we're more concerned about our place in the kingdom of God and his rule.

And we harness the name of the Messiah for all our favourite causes or for our own recognition and approval all under the guise of serving Jesus. We never want to replace Jesus as Messiah, just as Joab didn't want to replace the king.

But you see, it's very important to Joab to see himself as the kingmaker, to see himself as indispensable for the movement of the kingdom of God. And actually, the kingdom of God took second place to his own ambition.

[22 : 18] It's a great warning. Joab stops Amasa in his tracks. And the second incident, which is verses 14 to 22, a wise woman now stops Joab in his tracks.

This is another sermon, but it's very interesting through the books of Samuel how often wise women are set in opposition to worthless men. Not in the sense of our culture where anything, you say anything positive about men and you've offended and the only thing you can say is negative things about men and positive things about women.

However, a lot of positive things about women. There's only one woman who does anything wrong in these two books, but the men do lots wrong and the women tend to be wise. I think of Abigail and Nabal.

He was a worthless man. She was a wise woman. I think of Eli and Hannah. Anyway, that's another sermon. We'll pick that up another time. So Sheba's rebellion comes to another grisly end before it starts.

What happens? Well, Joab and the army are chasing Sheba all the way to the top of the country and they come to this walled city of Abel. Sheba has not been able to gather a lot of support, just his family.

[23 : 39] So he runs into this walled city and locks the gate and Joab and the army come up to the city and they're not going to wait for a siege. They want to commence slaughter as soon as possible so they start pounding on the walls.

Boom, boom, boom. And in the middle of the booming a voice calls out, verse 16, a woman cries out, listen, listen, tell Joab come here that I might speak to him.

And he comes, here I am, she says, listen and he says, I'm listening. Now what is it that can stop Joab in intent on slaughter? What is it that can bring an end to Sheba's rebellion?

It seems to be a wise woman. And Joab is so shocked that he stops. And in verse 18, she begins a speech where she says, they used to say, come to Abel and be wise.

In verse 19, she says, I am, or in the original it's, we are those who are peaceable. faithful, that's the word shalom, and faithful in Israel, you seek to destroy a city that's a mother in Israel, why will you swallow the heritage of the Lord?

[24 : 55] You say you're representing God and the kingdom of God and the king of God, but you're about to slaughter God's children here. You're treating us worse than you treat the Philistines. I mean, the battle protocol given in Deuteronomy 20 is that when you go and you take a city and you're about to fight the city, at least you offer terms of peace.

And she says, we are a city here committed to shalom peace and to faith in the God of Israel. They're our commitments. And I don't know why, but it stops Joab.

Perhaps it's the mention of shalom peace. Perhaps it's because Joab is more comfortable with one-on-one murder than with mass murder, although I doubt it. Perhaps it's because it comes from a woman.

And so in verse 20 to 21, he says, look, we're really only after Sheba. He's lifted up his hand against King David. And at the end of verse 21, the wise woman has a very practical solution.

Verse 21, the last sentence, the woman said to Joab, behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall. Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom and they cut off the head of Sheba, the son of Bikri and threw it out to Joab.

[26 : 09] So he blew the trumpet and they dispersed from the city, every man to his own home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king. What do you make of that? I don't know.

I really, and I promise you the commentaries are no help. I just, I don't know what to do with it. It's a terrible and grisly ending, Sheba's rebellion.

I can tell you that Sheba joins a growing list of people who have lost their heads in 1 and 2 Samuel, Dagon the God, Goliath, Saul, Ish-bosheth.

But the least we can say is this, that this event is connected in an unbroken chain of bloodshed back to David's sin. I think that's the way the story's told.

And so we come to the summary where we started, the end of chapter 20. The kingdom is still existing, but it's pretty fragile. Our hope for David to bring shalom, peace grows very faint.

[27 : 10] And in its place, Joab and his actions give a mounting toll of grisly endings. And don't you think, don't you feel as you come to this, this is so familiar to us.

I mean, we open the newspaper and we say, what have we become? What can we do? And as I mentioned earlier, next Sunday is the 30th annual Walk for Peace.

That desire for real peace is something that God has placed it deep in our hearts. The Bible keeps telling us it's not something we can construct, although we should work for it, but it comes to us as a gift from God.

And walking for peace and talking about peace are a very good thing to do. But what we really need is for God to send us someone who's going to establish peace, his peace, for eternity.

Someone who will be like us, but who will be more like him, who will demonstrate the shalom of a true shepherd. But someone also who will have the power to deal with the effects of the things we've done and reverse our troubles and bring it all into the service of our salvation.

[28 : 24] Do you remember last year, the terrible event in Norway? Where Anders Brajevic shot and killed 77 people. Brajevic defends himself, and he has recently, by claiming that the children in Norway are being Marxist, are being brainwashed by Marxist children's songs.

And he named one called Rainbow Children. I've looked up the words. It's a lovely little tune about how we all come from different races. women's songs. A mother in Oslo in April took a great exception to this.

Her name is Lil Huynavarg. And she thought it'd be a good idea if she got a few friends together and they went down to the city square in Oslo and they sang this song as a sort of act of defiance, to take the song back from being slimed, to stand up to what Brajevic did, to try and reverse his horror.

She thought she'd get a hundred people together and she put it out on Twitter or whatever you do and 40,000 people turned up. And they sang arm in arm, three and a half minutes, they sang this song.

I thought it was a great story, wonderful thing to do. But I've been thinking about it since and there's a sadness to it because although it was a wonderful thing to do, it didn't reverse the evil that Brajevic has done.

[29 : 44] It didn't bring anyone back from the dead and it hasn't established shalom in Norway. We need a Messiah who can reverse our sin and who can establish the shalom peace with justice and righteousness because we can't have a true shalom without those two things.

And I think that's what the books of 1 and 2 Samuel are doing for us in the Bible. They're making us long for a son of God who will embody this shalom peace.

And the New Testament tells us, I remind you, that he, Jesus himself, is our peace. And he has made peace by his death on the cross.

And not only did he bring a kingdom of peace, but in his death he overcame and reversed all the enemies of peace.

peace. In his death we have life. In his sacrifice we have salvation. It's too big for us to even contemplate in a way. Through his death on the cross Jesus defeated evil and he offers cleansing.

[30 : 57] God makes a change so that we might not just have peace in ourselves but peace with one another and peace with him. Not just a lowest common denominator peace.

Not just capitulation peace. But his death sets things to right. His death offers to make us whole. It's in his death that God offers the blessing of his presence.

It's there that we are changed and we are changed and we are changed and we are ongoingly changed and that's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper. To go back there again. To receive that shalom gift. And I think I want to say this as we finish the sermon.

If this is true and if you've received this gift pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers. And we can do that in hope and confidence because the Bible says the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

And that is what we are longing for and that is what Vancouver is what the whole world is longing for. Peace with God. a peace this world cannot give. And I think we ought to be very joyful about the peace that he offers us in Christ.

[32 : 07] We ought to take it with both hands. Try and live according to it and offer it to others. Let us pray. Lord, in your mercy, please respond.

Hear our prayer. Heavenly Father, God and King over Israel and over Judah, God of justice and ruler over all mankind.

We thank you and praise you that even in times of war, confusion, crisis and suffering, you reign over all.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you that we can look to you in unsettling times, knowing that this life is not the final destination, that you have already and will one day establish your everlasting kingdom in all its fullness, justice, righteousness, and in perfect lasting peace.

Thank you that your desire is for each of us to share in that eternal life and peace. For your glory and for the sake of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, turn our hearts toward you in a fresh way.

[33 : 53] By your Holy Spirit, renew our hope, grant us patience, and grant us the ability to view the events of our lives through the lens of faith, seeing each happening as part of your right, just, and mysterious plan.

Lord, in your mercy. We confess that we are prone to falling away. We repent of the many times that we have chosen to please ourselves rather than pleasing you, to pursue selfish gain instead of serving others, or to trust in ourselves and not in you.

Have mercy upon us, God our Father, for the sake of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, forgive us. By your Holy Spirit and for your glory, restore us to the way of truth and the way of peace.

Lord, in your mercy. We bring before you the people of Syria, the civil war raging in that country, and the devastation it has brought.

We also pray for the Greek election happening today, and for the crisis of leadership that threatens to further destabilize that country, that region, and beyond.

[35 : 29] In these and in the other concerns of our hearts, give strength to the weak, console those who grieve, restore those who are broken, and by your Spirit, draw to yourself all those who are in need.

Lord, in your mercy. We pray now for our leaders, for the Prime Minister, the Premier, the mayors of our cities, and all who serve in public office, and for the bishops of the Anglican Communion, and the clergy, ministers, and lay leaders of St. John's.

Direct all of them in wisdom and truth according to your perfect will. By your Spirit, grant that they would fulfill the responsibilities of their offices with integrity and care.

We pray for our fathers and grandfathers, and for all the men in our lives who have provided for us fatherly care, instruction, and examples of right living.

Bless them especially, our Heavenly Father, on this Father's Day. Lord, in your mercy. We pray for our missionaries, Catherine Gwinnett with North American Indigenous Ministries in Campbell River, Sharon Thompson with Wycliffe Bible Translators, and for Brian McConachie of Ratanac International.

[37 : 11] We pray for two Anglican Church in North America projects in Massachusetts, Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Marlborough, and St. Brigid of Kildare, Anglican Mission in Medway, Medfield.

We pray also for the sick and suffering, Derek, Rowena, Susan, Chris, Linda, Marguerite, Ruth, Glenn, and Colton.

We pray for the others who we now name silently in our hearts, who especially need your care. We lift them all to you, Heavenly Father, you who knows every deepest need, and who satisfies the longing of every heart.

Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Keep us in your care, Heavenly Father, through the days of this week. Cause us to remember you often in our homes, in our places of work and study, and as we travel.

Bring to our attention opportunities for us to bless others and to bring your presence into unsettled situations. May the power of your gospel transform us and the people who you place in our lives.

[38 : 43] In all things, be glorified forever through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.