

2 Samuel 4:1-12

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[0 : 00] 2 Samuel chapter 4, if you are looking in the Pew Bibles, that is page 257, 2 Samuel chapter 4.

If you haven't been with us through, if this is your first time tonight, we're sort of jumping into the, you're sort of jumping into the middle of a story where Saul was king, the first king in Israel, and at the end of, and his story is told through most of the book of 1 Samuel. At the end of 1 Samuel, Saul is killed in battle along with his son Jonathan. And David, who has previously been anointed king, actually quite a long time ago, is beginning to prepare to be anointed king.

But, there's a whole war between the house of Saul and the house of David that's going on in these first four chapters, and so we're coming to the conclusion of it. So, I'm just going to go ahead and read the chapter, and then we'll dive in. So, chapter 4 of 2 Samuel, beginning at verse 1.

When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner, the commander of his army, the former commander of his army, had died at Hebron. His courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. Now, Saul's son had two men who were captains of raiding bands. The name of the one was Banna, the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimon, a man of Benjamin from Beroth. From Beroth is also counted part of Benjamin.

The Berothites fled to Gittim and have been sojourners there to this day. Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame, and his name was Mephibosheth. Now, the sons of Rimon the Berothite, Rechab and Banna, set out, and about the heat of the day, they came to the house of Ish-bosheth, as he was taking his noonday rest. And they came into the midst of the house, as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Banna, his brother, escaped. When they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him. They took his head and went by way of the Arabah all night and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life.

[2 : 29] The Lord has avenged my lord, the king, this day on Saul and on his offspring. But David answered, Rechab and Banna, his brother, the sons of Rimon the Berothite, as the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity. When one told me, Behold, Saul is dead, and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news.

How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house, on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth? And David commanded his young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hang them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron. If you read the news, the world can seem pretty chaotic. Forest fires out west that have burned seven million acres, an earthquake this week in Chile, causing a million people to be evacuated from their homes, civil war in Syria resulting in nine million people displaced, three million seeking refuge in other countries. Even closer to home here in New Haven just this week, one of the largest public housing projects, Church Street South, also known as the Jungle, housing almost 300 families, has officially been condemned as unlivable due to leaky roofs and extensive mold. Already at least 30 families have been moved out, are staying in hotels, while the city and the management company are trying to figure out what to do.

And the HUD inspectors are arriving this week. Well, maybe you don't have to look at the news, maybe your own life feels crazy and chaotic, maybe you have sick kids or sick parents, corruption at work or crime in your neighborhood or unresolved conflicts among family and friends or

unresolved bitterness in your own heart. And sometimes you might wonder, what is God up to in such a crazy world? Now, on first glance, the chapter we're reading tonight seems chaotic.

I mean, it's pretty gory, violent. Abner, the end of the last chapter, Abner, the former commander of Ish-bosheth, who is the son of Saul, who had declared himself king, former commander of his army, has just been stabbed to death in broad daylight in the middle of the street by Joab, the commander of David's army. Now, in this chapter, these two guys, Banna and Rechab, captains in Ish-bosheth's army, stab Ish-bosheth to death. They turn on their leader. They stab him to death while he's taking an afternoon nap. They carry his head to David, hoping to be rewarded. David then has them executed, hands and feet cut off, bodies hanged. And then in the middle of the chapter, we have this odd reference to Mephibosheth, five-year-old who gets crippled. You might wonder, what is going on in this chapter? What do we take away from a chapter like this? What is God doing in the midst of all this chaos? Well, what we see in this passage is God is doing two things. He is bringing down the proud and he is raising up the humble. And in fact, that's what God is doing throughout much of this book of

Samuel, 1 and 2 Samuel. If you go back to the beginning of 1 Samuel and look at 1 Samuel chapter 2 for just a moment, there's a prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel chapter 2. And this prayer that Hannah prays, it sort of sets the agenda for the whole book of Samuel, for 1 and 2 Samuel, what God is doing here. And I'm not going to read all of Hannah's prayer, but look down at verse 3. Hannah says, talk no more, so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge and by him actions are weighed. Then she talks about these dramatic reversals. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has born seven, but she has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down to she all, that means the grave, and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and he exalts. If you want to summarize Hannah's prayer in one sentence, it's this, God brings down the proud and he raises up the humble.

[7 : 09] And that's what God is doing in this chapter. First, God is bringing down the proud, in particular, the house of Saul. Saul's kingdom had been characterized by pride and arrogance. We'll see some of that as we go along. But at the beginning of this chapter, we see that Saul's house is weakened. It's crippled.

Verse 1, Ish-bosheth heard that Abner had died, his army commander had died, his courage failed. Literally, that means his hands started shaking and all Israel was dismayed. Verse 4, Mephibosheth, that was Saul's grandson, was literally crippled due to an accident that happened on the day that his father and grandfather were both killed in battle. Saul and Jonathan. And you might wonder, why is this detail mentioned here when it happened several years beforehand? Well, I think, again, it's showing the weakness of Saul's house, right? Saul has reigned for a long time, but Saul has died and now none of his descendants are fit to rule the nation. As a crippled man, Mephibosheth would have been unable to lead the Israelites into battle, which was one of the main responsibilities of a king. But not only was Mephibosheth physically incapable of carrying out the royal responsibilities, we actually learn later on in chapter 9 that he didn't even want to be king, that he had pledged his loyalty to David, just like his father Jonathan did. That he recognized David as God's anointed king, and he was loyal to David, even though he was born into the house of Saul. Saul. And so we see this picture of the house of Saul sort of crippled, both physically and spiritually. And then we see these two guys, Banna and Recap, verse 2 and 3. You might sort of wonder, why all the geographical detail about Beroth, mentioned three times, the tribe of Benjamin, and, you know, the sons of Rimmon? What is, I mean, who are, where, who are those? What's the point of that?

Well, Beroth was one of the cities occupied in part by the Gibeonites. Now, the Gibeonites were a group of people who made a peace treaty with the people of Israel when they entered the promised land. It's recorded in Joshua 9. And so Joshua promised that they would always be safe within the land of Israel. But King Saul had violated that peace treaty. We don't actually learn this until the end of 2 Samuel. It's in 2 Samuel 21. But King Saul had actually, in his zeal to have a strong and unified nation, he had tried to go and wipe out the Gibeonites and drive them out, even though there was a peace treaty. They were supposed to be safe. There was a promise that had been made.

That Saul was responsible to uphold. And yet, he went after them. And so, the Israelites, living in those Gibeonite towns, had to run away. That's what verse 3 means in this chapter.

[10 : 25] The Berothites fled to Gitaim and have been sojourners, or resident aliens, or refugees. They are to this day. So imagine what it was like for these guys, Banna and Recap, right?

They were from King Saul's tribe, the tribe of Benjamin. So it's sort of like King Saul's your cousin, right? You're loyal to him. You're going to stick up for him and be on his side. But then, Saul attacks your hometown because he doesn't like your neighbors. And you have to run away. He lets you run away, but you have to live the rest of your life in exile away from your hometown.

And so, you kept working for Saul, right? These guys were sort of captains of raiding bands, right? They could, whatever, go take out their anger on other people, right? And still work for Saul, but there's some resentment there. And then, when things turn bad for Ish-bosheth, they say, here's our chance. Let's get rid of him and join with David instead. Notice verse 5 through 7, how it describes the killing of Ish-bosheth. Okay? He's not a war criminal. He's not a soldier who's killed in war. He's not a war criminal being executed for his crimes. He's portrayed as a helpless victim murdered in his own house. If you look at verse 6 and 7, if you read verse 6 and 7, you might think they're sort of repetitive. That's actually a common way that writers of the Old Testament would draw attention to particular facts as they would repeat them. It's sometimes called parallelism.

All right? They sort of tell the story one way and then tell the story again, highlighting slightly different details, but getting the same point across, right? Verse 5 says, he was taking his noonday rest in the midst of his house and they stabbed him in the stomach.

Verse 7 says, he lay on his bed in his bedroom, helpless, asleep, and they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him. It almost seems like Ish-bosheth was sort of ready to lay down and give up.

[12 : 34] He was hardly even trying to be king anymore. He had declared himself king over Israel, but seemed like he was ready to give that up.

Doesn't even have a bodyguard protecting him, which would have been unusual. So Recap and Banna, they weren't sort of courageously assassinating an evil dictator.

They were taking advantage of a defenseless and broken man. And then they brag about what they've done to David. They go to David and they must have told David the whole story because David says in verse 11, you killed him in his own house on his bed.

David had no other way to know that. Clearly they're bragging. Hey, this is how it happened. We just went in there and got rid of him. And now we want to be loyal to you. Don't you think we deserve a high place in your kingdom?

Now what we see here in this whole story is we see a destructive downward spiral in the house of Saul. And it starts with selfish ambition and reckless violence and cowardly deception, murderous revenge.

[13 : 44] And it just snowballs, right? It starts with Saul and his ambition to strengthen his own people. He murders the Gibeonites in violation of a peace treaty.

Instead of doing things God's way, Saul was taking matters into his own hands. But then the effect of what Saul did turned some of his own people away from him.

These guys from his own tribe who should have been loyal to him more than anybody else. And then they turn on his son and do the same thing. Murder him. The one who they were supposed to protect.

You see, Saul's kingdom lacked a solid foundation. And now it was falling apart once and for all. Saul's kingdom lasted for 40 years.

Ish-bosheth reigned for two years. But Saul's house ended in disgrace. Because, you know, if you read the story of Saul, Saul, he's, yes, he sins.

[14 : 46] But then the prophet Samuel comes to him and says, This is what you've done. And Saul says, Well, it wasn't really my fault. They forced me to do it.

I mean, please, you've got to understand me. I mean, a man's got to do what he's got to do. Saul never repented. He never confessed his sin.

And so his life just kept going down and down and down and down. And destroying itself and destroying each other. See, if we are building our kingdom on anything besides the promises of God and the faithfulness of God, it will ultimately self-destruct.

In the New Testament, the book of James says, Sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Sin starts small, often. Often it starts hidden. Things like pride. Or envy. Or lust.

[15 : 58] Or deception. Nobody else sees those things. At least not at first. But if they continue to grow, if they're never brought out into the light and recognized for what they are, the end result is chaos and destruction for individuals and for whole societies.

That's what we see in the kingdom of Saul breaking down. And you know, it can be even more dangerous when people try to justify sinful patterns by spiritualizing them.

Or by dressing them up in theological language. That's what Rechab and Banna, I don't know how to pronounce his name, Rechab, Rechab. But verse 8. Look at what they say in verse 8 when they come to David.

They say, The Lord has avenged my Lord, the king, this day on Saul and on his offspring. In other words, God was accomplishing his will through us and we were instruments of his justice.

And David says, No. What you did was not justice. It was murder. You know, it's very dangerous when people use spiritual language to justify sin.

[17 : 16] How about something like this? Sister, I wanted to share a prayer request with you. You know, it's about this other woman in our church.

I think she and her husband might be getting a divorce. I overheard them arguing as they left church last week. It was so embarrassing. Would you pray for her? They really need some counseling, you know.

That's not a prayer request. That's gossip. And gossip destroys churches. It can destroy your relationships.

James says, How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire and the tongue is a fire. Or how about this one? God told me.

God told me that I should marry this guy even though he hasn't had a job for three years and I've only known him for two months and he isn't part of a church but I feel peace about it.

[18 : 25] God told me. Or how about this? Occasionally I hear this one. God told me that I am called to become a great pastor and preach to thousands of people.

Well maybe he did. But have you started by being a good shepherd in your own home? By loving your wife and your kids? Or if you're single loving your roommates?

Serving the least of these? Jesus' brothers and sisters. See Jesus says the way to become a leader is to be a servant. The Bible says God will bring down those who are proud.

And this is a warning. God brought down the house of Saul. It ended in self-destruction and chaos. But there's also an encouragement here.

God raises up the humble. Look at David's response at verse 9 to these two guys. The first thing he says the Lord has redeemed my life out of every adversity.

[19 : 37] Think of all the adversity that David has faced so far. He's faced adversity from his family. He was the youngest brother. Right? The youngest sibling.

His older brothers despised him. His father overlooked him. When the important prophet Samuel was coming to their house to anoint the future king of Israel David was simply left out taking care of the sheep and all the other brothers were brought before him.

When he came to serve his brothers who were fighting in the battle they didn't and he asked a question what's going on here? Why are you asking questions?

Get out of here. He was despised. He faced adversity from his boss King Saul tried to kill him 18 times.

You think you have a hard boss? David had much worse. Saul tried to turn his best friend against him and stole his wife from him.

[20 : 45] David faced adversity from his enemies from the Amalekites who kidnapped his wives while he was away one day out at work took over his city he had to chase him down from the Philistines who sheltered him for a while and then turned on him he faced adversity from his friends at one point David was living in a cave and it said everybody who was discontented and bitter in soul came to live with him.

Just imagine being in charge of 400 men in the middle of the desert living in a cave and it's all these guys who are bitter and discontent.

David says I faced all these adversities and there's one thing that's always been constant the Lord has redeemed my life out of every adversity.

The Lord has promised to be with me from the very beginning and he's never left me and I know he's never going to leave me all the way to the end whatever I face.

God is my redeemer he's my rescuer and that's why David rejected these guys attempt to take matters into their own hands and murder Ish-bosheth.

[22 : 11] he says to them God is my redeemer you are not God is my rescuer not you in verse 11 David says wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house you might think well it's pretty generous to call Ish-bosheth a righteous man Ish-bosheth sets up a rival kingdom to David's I mean he he's not the greatest guy I don't think David was saying Ish-bosheth was perfect he's clearly not saying that I think what he was saying is that he was innocent of a crime that deserved the death penalty that Ish-bosheth did not deserve to be murdered in his own house on his own bed when by all appearances he was ready to give up anyway so David executed justice on these men who had killed Ish-bosheth that's basically David saying you have committed premeditated cold-blooded murder and so you deserve the death penalty that's why he responds to them so harshly

I understand it seems harsh he cuts off their hands and feet well their hands did the deed and their feet carried his head all the way to David so there's a little bit of ironic justice there that's why he cuts them off I think now these first four chapters of 2 Samuel have been full of chaos and violence some pretty nasty things that have gone on here but think think about it if you've read these chapters if you've been here the last few weeks what is what do we see David doing in these chapters we see David prayerfully waiting and trusting God instead of selfishly seizing power David waits for God to bring down his rivals he doesn't try to take matters into his own hands and do it himself now people have pointed out of course there's some political wisdom there right David sort of quiet slowly gains the support of people who might be most prone to oppose him but I think there's more than just David being a shrewd politician David waited because he trusted in God as his redeemer one commentator put it this way he said we see in these chapters we see David praying waiting for his kingdom to be given to him under the sovereignty of God right David had been anointed a long time ago to be the future king of Israel and Saul had died and this rival king had stepped up and David doesn't say I've got to immediately shut him down he doesn't respond out of insecurity he says I'm going to trust the Lord and wait on God's timing so we see David refusing to hurry in contrast to the frenzy of ambition that David sees around him excited by Saul's empty throne David conducts a funeral for Saul and Jonathan composes poetry marries and has children and administers justice in contrast to all the killing going on around him to grab power David does not kill anyone who could be considered a rival David was humble and confident in the Lord and so he was able and willing to wait upon the Lord instead of taking matters into his own hands now if you look at these chapters right David's an imperfect example of prayerfully waiting on God and God raises him up this is the next chapter if you come back next week David becomes king over all Israel he unifies the nation that was falling apart under Saul's proud and self-centered leadership he unifies the nation he defeats their enemies there's a there's triumph but we see David prayerfully and patiently waiting for God you know and then he's raised up to be king but you know in the in the big story of the Bible there's someone else who prayerfully waited and patiently waited on God's timing before he was he was publicly recognized as king right when Jesus Christ began his ministry he went out into the desert and Satan came to him and Satan showed him all the kingdoms of the world and Satan said if you just bow down to me it can all be yours right now easy and Jesus said no worship the Lord your God and serve only him I won't take a shortcut I won't take matters into my own hands I'm trusting the will of my father and then a little later on Jesus Christ fed the 5,000 in the desert and it says some people wanted to make him king by force and it says he walked through the crowd and went away and then he was arrested and his disciples took up their swords to defend him and Peter sliced off the high priest's servant's ear and Jesus says no more of that you live by the sword you die by the sword my kingdom is not of this world that's not the way to establish it you see

[28 : 01] Jesus was the rightful king of all he knew that from the beginning but he patiently waited so that God's plan might be accomplished he humbled himself to the point of death on a cross and God raised Jesus to life that's what he sang that great song forever he is glorified forever he is lifted high because he humbled himself to death to the point of death on the cross in obedience to God and one day Jesus promises he'll come back and he'll establish his kingdom once and for all and he promises that we'll be part of it and that if we trust in him we'll also reign with him in the new heavens and the new earth so you see like David in these chapters we're waiting for a kingdom to come that's what David is doing in these first four chapters of second Samuel he's waiting for the kingdom to come for him to reign and that's also our position if we put our trust in Jesus as our king

and savior and we're waiting for him to come again and he promises he'll come and he'll establish a glorious kingdom but you know

I think sometimes we we don't believe that promise or we think it's never going to happen right and so we're tempted to take matters into our own hands what does that look like well sometimes we sometimes we get into a frenzy of activity have you ever been so busy you're like cutting people off in traffic cutting in front of people on the sidewalk because you have a place to go and wherever you are going is more important than anywhere that anybody else is going that day because you have a kingdom to build and the time is now and you better not wait really is that God's kingdom that you're building when we're doing that when we over commit ourselves when we can't stop to pray and we think that the salvation of the world ultimately depends on us but no we're not the Messiah or maybe maybe we've been wronged maybe we've been hurt and maybe we feel like I just can't let it go I need justice now and we just can't let go of the bitterness we can't wait and trust that God will right wrongs someday and so our responsibility is not to make all our enemies pay our responsibility is step by step to walk in trust and obedience to the Lord and speak truth speak in love and be willing to forgive sometimes we take matters into our own hands sometimes we go to the other end we retreat and we become passive out of fear again right when we don't believe that Jesus will come again and that we'll be part of his kingdom forever we either try to build the kingdom by ourselves or we decide it's not worth it I'm just I'm not I I I and we lose our courage maybe we're afraid to engage with the brokenness of the world because we fear that we'll get totally sucked into it right and so we might admire when other people spend time helping refugees or mentoring troubled teenagers or working with people who are homeless but we think man I don't want to get into it because if I get sucked into that then I'll never be able to say no and I'll burn out and so we retreat and we do nothing out of fear we go back and forth between trying to do everything and taking everything into our own hands and then giving up and saying I'm not going to do anything David says in Psalm 20 70 says wait for the

Lord be strong and take courage and wait for the Lord see waiting for the Lord doesn't mean being passive and not doing anything and it doesn't mean trying to take everything into our own hands and trying to be the Messiah it means doing something while we trust God to be the ultimate judge and while we say with David the Lord has redeemed my life out of every adversity he's the one he's brought me through and he will continue to bring me through he's been with me all the way and he's never going to leave me so I can live in that confidence in a world full of chaos and violence and unresolved tensions we're called to wait patiently in light of God's promise to establish his kingdom in the future let me close with these words from first

[33 : 30] Peter Peter says this he says humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so at the proper time he may exalt you casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you but then he concludes his letter with a promise he says after you have suffered a little while the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore confirm strengthen and establish you to him be the dominion and glory forever amen let's pray Lord we thank you for your word Lord we thank you that you are a God who brings down the proud but lifts up the humble Lord tonight we want to confess to you the ways that we have been proud the ways that we have tried to take matters into our own hands repaid evil for evil instead of overcoming evil with good we confess to you the ways that we have sometimes given up and just want to disengage but

Lord we thank you for your words that David spoke that you are the one who has redeemed our lives out of every adversity we thank you Lord Jesus that we too can claim that promise because of what you have done for us that you will never leave us nor forsake us and Lord that you are the king and one day your kingdom will be established in its fullness so Lord teach us to wait patiently teach us to act courageously teach us to trust in you above all else we pray this in Jesus name amen at the end of our evening service we often take five minutes or so for any questions and answers I know this is a challenging passage with you may have questions we have time for maybe two or three questions tonight if anyone has them so feel free to raise your hand questions or brief comments and we'll do the best we can with them yes yes yes so the question was

I understand about the house of Saul being humbled but what about Jonathan right Jonathan was a faithful man he was a faithful friend to David he was loyal to David and yet he was killed his offspring never became king right so we do see with Jonathan's son Mephibosheth I'm gonna struggle with that name but if you're looking for a name for your son Pastor Nick Nick and Beth are due with the baby soon so you can pray for them for a safe delivery and pray for them as they think

about a name and maybe it'll be Mephibosheth all right sorry sorry Nick okay so Jonathan's son Mephibosheth later in 2 Samuel we'll see that David David actually shows kindness to Mephibosheth and gives him a special place at his table and David and Jonathan had sort of promised to be loyal to one another Jonathan had basically said you know normally in the ancient world kingship is passed on to the firstborn son Jonathan says you know I have the right to that but God has chosen you David and so I'm gonna put all my eggs in your basket what's the metaphor right I'm gonna give all my loyalty to you rather than to try to fight for what I think I deserve or whatever he says no I actually don't deserve anything right I didn't choose to be born in this family I'm willing to give my loyalty to David and so David promises also loyalty to Jonathan now it's a tragedy when Jonathan is killed in battle right with his father Saul that's one of the tragic moments in the book of Samuel and David weeps for Jonathan and he weeps over the reality that in this world in this fallen world sometimes one person will bear the consequences of the sin of another right in this fallen world and we sort of see that in Jonathan right falling in battle along with his father Saul though Jonathan is portrayed as very loyal right ultimately Jesus Christ becomes that man who's willing to bear the consequences of our sin even though he had no sin right and so Jonathan is really a picture of Jesus Christ in many ways that he bears the consequence of another sin and yet he remains faithful to God and remains loyal to God's appointed King David so even though Jonathan's life ends in being cut down in battle and his son is crippled

[39 : 24] I think we do begin to see some of God's redemption and how David treats Mephibosheth and also just in the promise of God Jonathan and Mephibosheth will probably be honored in God's kingdom because God was faithful to them and so we don't see the end of that story either great question one or two other questions yes yes God had already proclaimed David to lead his people yes yes Saul had sort of he had failed to be loyal to God a long time ago and so his kingdom was sort of going down and down and he was persecuting

David and David gave him David said you know David sort of gave him a lot of chances and David was like you know what I'm not you know Saul I could have killed you I could have got rid of you I didn't and he shows that love for his enemy right that Jesus Christ says love your enemies do good to those who hate you that's what David did to Saul and yet Saul continued in his downward spiral in his pride in his refusing to acknowledge his own sin and yet David patiently waited on the Lord and God was faithful to him so yes yes yes the Reckbytes that is great question I don't know but that's something we can do a little research this week so

I enjoy question and answer because usually I get at least one question that I don't know the answer to but it stimulates hopefully our thinking and digging deeper into God's word well it's getting late so let me conclude a couple things in your bulletin a couple announcements let me highlight there is and if you look sort of in the middle page of your bulletin there is something that says help local refugee families