

2 Samuel 21:1-14

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening.

Let's start with reading our passage. If you'd open your Bibles, if you're looking in the Pew Bible, it's on page 273. We were looking at 2 Samuel, chapter 21, the first part of that chapter.

Now, there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the Lord.

And the Lord said, there is blood guilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death. So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them.

Now, the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.

[1 : 07] And David said to the Gibeonites, what shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?

The Gibeonites said to him, it is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house. Neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel. And he said, what do you say that I shall do for you?

They said to the king, the man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord.

And the king said, I will give them. But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan, the son of Saul.

[2 : 17] The king took the two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Ai, whom she bore to Saul, Armani and Mephibosheth, and the five sons of Merib, the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel, the son of Barzillai, the Mehalothite.

And he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the Lord, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of Bar the harvest.

Then Rizpah, the daughter of Ai, took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of the harvest, until rain fell upon them from the heavens, and she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night.

When David was told what Rizpah, the daughter of Ai, the concubine of Saul, had done, David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh Gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Bethshon, where the Philistines had hanged them on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa.

And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan, and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged, and they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin and Zila, in the tomb of Kish, his father.

[3 : 49] And they did all that, and they did all that the king commanded. And after that, God responded to the plea for the land. Well, that's quite a passage.

In our morning services, we've been preaching through the book of 1 Corinthians, and Pastor Matt this morning opened his sermons basically by saying, we didn't plan this, but in God's providence, here we come to a passage in 1 Corinthians 7 that's all about sex on Valentine's Day.

Well, we didn't plan this, but here in God's providence, we've been preaching through the book of Samuel for a long time in this service, and we get to a passage that's all about the St. Valentine's Day massacre.

I am thrilled that this congregation has been going through Samuel because it's one of my favorite books, a book that I have learned an awful lot from. I was not involved in the conversations when the pastors and elders chose what to preach, but I can pretty easily imagine how it went, knowing everyone involved.

I think Greg was probably the one who said, we've never preached through Samuel in our church. Why don't we do that? And the other pastor was like, that's a great idea. I bet we have a lot to learn. And they were like, who wants to preach on David and Goliath?

[5 : 10] Oh, I do, I do. And who wants to preach on God's covenant with David when he tells about Jesus coming? I do, I do, I do. And who wants to preach on when Nathan confronts David and tells him to stop sinning?

Oh, I'll take that. And who wants to preach on the Gibeonite massacre? Crickets. And they were like, hmm, who's a real chump we could ask to preach on that for us?

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Rob Dunlop, and this is my sermon on the Gibeonite massacre. Now, in the book of Samuel, and I'm going to keep calling the book of Samuel because 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel are really all just one story.

It happens to be that it was a long enough story that they ran out of paper in the first scroll, and so they had to use two scrolls, and that's where you get 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel from. But it's really just one long story.

In the book of Samuel, the whole thing has been a chronological account of what happened in the days of the life of David and Saul, particularly, up until the passage that Greg preached on last week.

[6 : 23] And now these last few chapters of Samuel don't fit into that chronological history. And so, that clearly just kind of marks them off somehow.

When my small group went through the book of Samuel about three years ago, I got here and I listened to a bunch of passages that I really respect, and almost all of them said, yeah, so, like, they couldn't figure out what to do with these passages, so they kind of tacked them on at the end. And you should think of this as an appendix. Or, so, this also happened. That would be a pretty good way of characterizing the passage we've just read. But as I was looking at it, I noticed that, and this wasn't all my thinking, I'm not going to take credit, but the book of Samuel has three major passages of songs.

One song comes right in the beginning when Hannah gives thanks for the birth of her son Samuel and writes a song of thanks to God. One song comes right in the middle.

After Saul dies, David laments over the death of Saul and his son Jonathan, which gets alluded to in our passage. And the third song, section of songs, comes, as you'll see in chapter, I think, 22 and 23, when David writes a psalm and the last words of David are also a song.

[7 : 51] And so that struck me as, well, that seems pretty integral to the structure of the book, to have these three songs so carefully laid out, this last one coming after, in the section that everyone else is saying is just an appendix.

Then I noticed that the appendix, and I noticed because I read it in the commentary, is very carefully structured. You have our story this week, David cleans up a mess because of a mistake that Saul made.

Then you have a story about David's mighty men. And then you have a son. And then you have a son. And then you have a story about David's mighty men. And then you have a story about how David cleans up a mess from a mistake that he made.

And so that parallelism makes me think that this section is not just a bunch of, oh, and this happened too, and I forgot about it. But it's actually well-crafted and an integral part of the book. So I'm thinking, what's going on here? As I was teaching through this in my small group three years ago, I said, well, why don't I go on the hypothesis that this isn't an appendix, but it's a proper conclusion to this book?

[9 : 12] And by that, I mean that you've read through the book up to this point, and you've still got real questions about what does this all mean? And now the author is going to take well-chosen passages, not because they happened at the end of David's life, but because they were the best passages to make his point, and answer the biggest questions that we ought to have as readers, having gotten to this point.

And what I discovered is that these six stories, so before I actually studied the six stories, I laid out and said, what are my biggest questions? And I discovered that these six stories answered them very methodically.

So that became one of the triggers whereby this story helped me understand what the whole book of Samuel is about. And in fact, it was one of the biggest helps for me as a Christian that I've found in many years.

So I am preaching this passage not because I want to bail out our poor pastors from having to deal with something really icky, but because in fact this is one of my favorite passages, not because I'm any more comfortable with what goes on in the story, but because God used it to teach me some really important lessons.

I'm hoping that over the course of the sermon, I can share some of those lessons with you and help you make sense of it. So, by far, if you're this far into Samuel, the biggest question you have is what really was the difference between David and Saul?

[10:48] Very clearly, God was against Saul and very clearly, David was a man after God's own heart. But, why?

What's the real difference between them? What's good about David or bad about Saul or I don't get it? That's the question I had. Before we can even get to answering that question, which is the question I think this passage is written to help us sort through, there's a question of why do I even care about David and Saul?

So let's start with that one. And that one, because I think much of the book of Samuel is written to help us understand what the difference is between David and Saul, you have to ask, well, why was Samuel written?

Well, the book of Samuel was written as a sequel to the book of Judges. So it kind of pushes you back one step. You have to say, well, why was Judges written? Well, the book of Judges was written as a sequel to the book of Joshua.

Okay, so why was Joshua written? It was a sequel to the book of Deuteronomy. And before you know it, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[11:57] I think that's the only place we're going to be able to start. You go right back to creation, and the piece out of the creation story that I want to pick up on is when he creates Adam and Eve.

He says, let us make man in our image and let him rule over the birds of the air and the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea and the things that creep and crawl along the ground.

What you get from that is God made us in his image, and I understand that to be God wanted us to uniquely share something in common with him so that we could have a relationship with him.

And the focus of that relationship was to be on ruling over creation. In other words, God was saying, I love watching my creation flourish.

And I want to share that joy with someone. So I'm going to make mankind who are able to rule over this world so that they know something of the joy of what it is to see something under your care flourish.

[13:20] And that when God wants to have a relationship with us, that is the primary focus of what the relationship should be made of, is that shared experience of ruling and watching creation flourish.

lest you think that's just Genesis 1 idea, and then God realized that wasn't going to work so well and gave up on it. Back to our morning series, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul tells us that in heaven, you and I, if you are a believer in Jesus, will be judging the angels.

So both Old Testament and New Testament talk about ruling as being a core part of our eternal destiny. So, that's the starting thought, is God made us to relate to him in, particularly, in his character as a king.

Then you get most of the Old Testament up until the book of Samuel, and much of what that is about is God trying to teach us what he is like and what it would look like for us, as humans, to live lives that reflect his character.

And so that's particularly what Deuteronomy is about, is I basically see Moses is writing the first four books of the Bible in order to set up Deuteronomy, and he gets to Deuteronomy, he's like, okay, now here's the covenant that God wants to make with you.

[14:51] This is what it looks like to live as God's people. And you get to the end of Deuteronomy, and Moses sums it up pretty tightly. He's like, you've heard all the laws that God wants you to obey.

You've heard the root issue is not, are you obeying these laws, but is your heart loving the Lord? And are you obeying them out of that motivation?

If you keep this covenant, God is going to bless you beyond anything you can imagine. And it's just like, whether you're inside or outside, whether you're eating or exercising, whatever you do, God's going to bless you there.

And it just goes on and on for about 10 or 20 verses about how much God will bless us if we keep his covenant. And then he says, and if you disobey this covenant and break it, God will curse you. And that goes on for a lot longer. And God says, so if you obey him, he'll bless you beyond what you can imagine. If you disobey him, he'll curse you beyond what you can imagine.

[16:00] So that's the book of Deuteronomy. And as I said, Joshua is a sequel to that. And the point of Joshua is essentially the generation that followed Moses chose to obey.

And God really did bless them beyond anything you can imagine. And there are crazy stories in Joshua. Like, hey God, this is a pretty good day. Can you make it last a little longer? And God's like, what do you want me to do?

Stop the sun in the sky? And they're like, that'd be a good idea. And God's like, no problem. That's the sort of like God blesses them beyond anything you can imagine sort of relationship they had.

And the end of Joshua is exhaustive in showing all the different ways that God was faithful to keep every promise he made to them and bless them beyond what they could imagine.

That's a nice sequel. Then you get to Judges. The book of Judges is, put simply, the people didn't continue to keep God's covenant.

[17:02] And life got really bad. Not so much because you see God's curses in Judges, but you just see the depravity of the human heart working itself out. And the people of Israel just get worse and worse and worse.

And the book of Judges opens by saying, there's a little bit of problem. They don't have a leader like Joshua anymore. And you get past chapter one and the book of Judges is like, no, we got a real problem.

There's not a leader like Joshua anymore. And by the time you get to the end of Judges, the refrain that you hear four times over is, they didn't have a good leader.

And the end of Judges is really, really bad. And you have to have that in mind because that's where Samuel's going to pick up from. The end of Judges is essentially there's a concubine who gets gain-raped by an entire city.

They appeal to justice to the surrounding towns. The towns come to the defense of the rapists. So then they appeal to justice to the entire nation. It starts a civil war.

[18:18] The civil war gets a little out of hand. They decide to pursue a program of genocide to kill off that tribe. Then they decide the genocide might have been a step too far. So they're worried that the tribe of Benjamin, which was about to die out, there won't be any woman left to bear children.

So they decide to solve that problem by raping another 400 women. You read that sort of story, you're like, these people deserve to be cursed. This is sick and bad.

And so if you're coming from the Deuteronomy picture of if you obey me I will bless you, if you disobey me I will turn on you, you expect the sequel to Judges to be the story about how God curses his people.

You expect this to be the story of God's punishment. punishment. And you will not understand the book of Samuel unless you start with the shock of God's being patient with these people.

Why is he being so patient? Why is God withholding the punishment that we so clearly deserve? serve? You can't get very far into Samuel without realizing that something about kingship is at the heart of that answer.

[19:49] And as best as I've been able to guess at it, God's thinking right back to why did I create these people in the first place? And he's thinking, oh yeah, it's because I really wanted them to share that experience of what it means to be good kings, good rulers.

And here I have, because these people prove themselves so faithless, so wicked, I have a unique opportunity to show them what my kingship looks like.

you will never understand God's patience more clearly when you see it in response to your stubbornness.

You'll never understand his mercy more clearly than when you see it in response to your depravity. You'll never understand God's faithfulness more clearly than when you see it in response to your

faithlessness.

I think God looked at the people and said, these are stubborn, depraved, and faithless people. What a wonderful opportunity for me to show them what a good king is, who responds in patience, in faithfulness, and in grace and mercy.

[21 : 10] So the book of Samuel opens with God is the great king. And that was, if you go back to, if you remember back in 1 Samuel chapter 5, there's a story about how the Israelites went into battle against the Philistines, and they brought the ark with them because they thought it was a good luck charm, and it didn't work out the way they expected.

They lost the battle, the Philistines stole the ark. This is where you start to see God is the great king. Totally independent of what the people are doing, they are clearly somewhere between wicked and clueless.

The ark goes into the land of the Philistines. And what are the problems of Israel at this point? You have the obvious problems that people are just messed up. But you have the surface level problems of they're slave to the Philistines, they're dishonored, their borders aren't secure, they're living in fear.

As the Philistines take the ark around to each town, something terrible happens. We're not quite sure, but it sure seems like a bubonic plague came on the Philistines, something of that nature. And essentially, God single-handedly wipes out the Philistine army. The idols of the Philistines keep falling down and worshipping the ark, so he reestablishes the honor of the Israelite religion.

[22 : 39] More than that, he reestablishes the honor of the Israelites, because the Philistines are reacting and saying, if these Israelites can deal with this God, they're a whole different sort of people than we are.

And they say, we need to treat the Israelites with reverence, if they're able to have a relationship with a God like this, because this God is too much for us. And then they send the ark back with a, I'm sorry, no, and please forgive us and we'll never do that again to you, type offering.

And so God secures the borders of the land. So you see God as King doing all the things you expect a king to do. All on his own, he's restoring the dignity of his people, he's restoring the security of his people.

And he's helping the people understand what it means to actually worship the true God. So, that would be a nice lesson if it stopped there.

But the real problem again is that we as a people are just so messed up that we look at a God like that and our reaction is not, I want that sort of king. Our reaction is, get me away from him.

[23 : 56] And that's exactly what the people of Israel did. They said to Samuel, we want a human king, not a God king. We want a king that we can see and touch and maybe manipulate or bribe.

They didn't actually say that, but it becomes pretty clear that's where they're headed. And so you see the real problem in the human heart there.

And God, Samuel gets upset by this. He's like, why are they rejecting God? And God says, let's give them a king anyway. I'll give them Saul.

So, now you have the stories of Saul, the bad king, and David, the good king. And your first theory is, it's very early on that you get told that David's going to be a king after God's own heart.

And so most of the life of Saul, and all the life of David basically, you're working with this idea that Saul's a rejected king, David is an accepted king, and you're wondering why.

[25 : 01] Your first theory is, well, Saul's probably just a bad king, and David's a good king. And there's some evidence for that. That's not a crazy theory to have. Saul is a bad king.

He slaughters all the priests in the town of Nob. In our passage here, he massacred the Gibeonites. He, in his dealings with David, was consistently paranoid.

He turned to sorcery. He's a complete hypocrite when he does that, because he's the one who had wiped out sorcery. He is constantly bitter about the fact that God has rejected him.

He deflects blame all over the place. And most of all, he's just ruthless in his lust for power. Over the course of the book of Samuel, Saul attempts to murder David no less than 16 times.

That's a pretty bad king. David, as a good king, there's some good story for that too. David shows remarkable courage.

[26 : 05] He seems to have absolutely no fear of death whatsoever. He's successful. He seems like it's a one man against an army. He's no problem for David. David. David listens to the prophets.

He listens to the priests in his life. He's turning to God the way he ought to. On the side, over the course of Samuel, he pretty much writes the book of Psalms.

You've got to give him some credit for that. most notably, especially in 1 Samuel, David just refuses to seize power.

And you see something remarkable about David's lack of selfish ambition. God tells David, you're going to be king someday, and David's like, all right, I'll just wait.

I'm not going to seize power, overthrow Saul, kill him, depose him, any of that. If God wants me to be king, I will wait until God makes me king.

[27 : 13] And so, particularly in contrast to Saul's lust for power, you see a real difference between David and Saul there. So, you could get to the end of 1 Samuel and think, that's basically it.

David's a good king, Saul's a bad king. But, as you all know well, 2 Samuel doesn't play into that story all that well. Even before David becomes king, he starts doing things that are a little bit off. He deceives the priest at Nob and makes him take a risk beyond what they probably would have taken on their own, such that they do end up getting killed by Saul. He pretends to be insane when he's among the Philistines.

It doesn't exactly look like the picture of courage. But then, most notably, we have Bathsheba and the adultery. Uriah, the murder.

Then you have his daughter Tamar gets raped. David doesn't do anything. His son Amnon gets murdered. David doesn't seem to care. His son Absalom seizes the throne, starts a civil war, tries to overthrow the nation.

[28 : 31] And David just doesn't seem to be troubled by how this is ruining the people God has put him in charge of. And so by the time you get here, you're looking at David and thinking, this is not nearly the good king that I thought he was.

This is a king who seems like content to let the entire nation suffer, if only for his wicked son Absalom, to survive or be honored. It doesn't make sense.

And in fact, as you get through the book of Samuel, particularly as you go into Cain's, which you guessed it, is a sequel to Samuel, you start getting hints that Saul wasn't such a bad king in other ways.

Saul actually instituted a major religious reform, getting rid of sorcery in Israel. Saul was the first king. It's a lot of work to set up a government.

You have to set up a police department, you have to set up a court system, you have to set up jails, you have to set up an army, you have to set up a tax collection agency, you have to do this and that, and it seems like Saul pretty much did all that stuff and did it effectively.

[29 : 42] And so the state of Israel has the hands of Saul, the pretty talented civil servant, all over it. So this idea that David's just bad and Saul's just good doesn't quite fit as like that's the big lesson from Samuel.

So then I think most people come up with a second lesson, a second theory about what this is all about. Theory number two is David repents of his sin and Saul never repents.

And there's some good evidence for that. There are at least three, maybe four times in his life when David is very directly rebuked for what he did or what he's about to do.

Abigail rebukes him when he's about to murder Abigail's husband. Nathan rebukes him after he does murder Uriah. Joab, as we saw I think last week, rebukes David when, or two weeks ago, three weeks ago, when David refuses to welcome home the troops who had saved him from Absalom's rebellion.

And in every time that David was rebuked, he does repent. That last repentance was a little iffy, not the best, but there is repentance there.

[31 : 19] So there's something to this idea that unlike Saul, who really never repents, David does respond in repentance.

when convicted of his sin. So that's a nice theory. But then you go back to the rape of Tamar, the murder of Amnon.

Those are big sins, not that David committed them, but that David was totally indifferent to them and didn't punish the people that did commit them. That's a real problem for a king, to just tolerate rape, tolerate murder.

And David never repents of those that we can see. And so if this is the big idea of the book of Samuel, it doesn't quite fit either. So then a third possible theory.

There's a story of when David was bringing the ark into Jerusalem because he wanted to have God as close to him as possible.

[32 : 29] And in the procession where they were bringing the ark up to Jerusalem, David danced in front of it and it seems like he showed a little bit too much skin and the servant girls were going, hee, hee, hee, hee.

And David's wife, Michal, who was Saul's daughter, rebukes him for it and says, David, that's not the way king behaves.

And David responds to her and is shockingly direct, this is why I am king and your father is not king, nor is any son of your father king.

Because I don't try to please people. I only care about what God thinks of me. So if you were to ask David, what's the real difference between you and Saul?

That's what David says. He says, Saul was a people pleaser. I live to please the Lord. And I would say, when David's at his best, that's clearly true.

[33 : 36] But David's not always at his best. And you have all this material in 2 Samuel about Absalom's rebellion and the rape of Tamar and the murder of Ammon and so on and so forth, saying David's not always just trying to please the Lord.

Sometimes he's just trying to please himself. Sometimes he just seems lazy. So, we get to 2 Samuel 21, or at least I got here, with 3 half-baked theories about what this whole book is trying to teach me about David versus Saul.

And I want to know the question of why is David different than Saul? Because I believe that in one real sense, God put history on hold to teach me this lesson so that I would know what it means when he says, I want you to have a relationship with me.

I made you to be a ruler. I want you to know what it means to be a ruler. Look at David. Look at Saul. David's a man after my own heart.

Saul is not. Figure out that difference and you will be able to have a relationship with me that's the sort of relationship I created you to have. So, I'm interested in knowing this.

[34 : 55] I've given three tries of figuring it out. None of them quite worked. And now I get to our passage in 2 Samuel 21, the Gibeonite massacre. So, let me just retell you the story quickly to make sure you understand everything that's going on here.

The Gibeonites are not Israelites. They are one of the Canaanite people that God had originally told Joshua to drive out of the land. The Gibeonites were more clever than the rest of the Canaanites and tricked Joshua into making a treaty with them that he would not drive them out of the land and let them live there.

Saul, while he was king, said, Treaty Shmidi, I'm more powerful than you now. I'm going to take your land back. And tried to kill them off.

Seems to have killed off many of them, not all of them. Years later, after David becomes king, the Gibeonites pray to God and say, we need justice because of this massacre that happened.

And so God sends a famine on the land. And David prays to God and says, why did this famine come? And God reveals to him, it's because the Gibeonites never got justice.

[36 : 15] That much we can all handle. Now we get to the part that's really awkward. David goes to the Gibeonites and says, what do I have to do to make things right?

They say, kill seven of Saul's sons. David's like, okay, I'll do that. But I'm not going to kill any of Jonathan's sons because I made a treaty with Jonathan. So he kills seven other descendants of Saul.

The Gibeonites accept it. God accepts it. Well, not quite yet. Then you have this story about Saul's concubine feels disrespected because her family was just killed.

And so David says, I'll make you right too by having the proper state funeral that Saul should have gotten. So he has a state funeral for Saul and Jonathan. And then God says, okay, everyone's good.

It sure seems like the seven people that get killed here didn't get justice. I think any modern reader looks at this story and it's just, that jumps out.

[37 : 32] I don't have great explanations here. I have some explanations. I'll share with you the way I think about this. Maybe it'll be enough for you. Maybe you'll want to talk to me after. That's fine.

The first thing I would note is the very end of our passage, verse 14, God says, we've settled this.

So as much as we might be like, this doesn't seem right to me, if you believe that God is just, then you have to take his ruling for what it is.

God says somehow this made things right. Second thing I would note, in the setup of the kingdom of that time, it is highly implausible that sons and grandsons of Saul would not have been high-ranking officials in his administration, and therefore at some level complicit in various things that Saul did wrong, and there were many things that Saul did wrong.

So it is not at all implausible that these seven people actually did deserve to die. So that moved me from, I see people, innocent people getting killed, to I just don't see due process of the law being followed.

[38 : 52] Where is the trial by jury, and all those things that we have come to associate with, this is what it takes for laws to be applied impartially. At that point I have to say, yep, when I'm studying literature from a culture that lived on the other side of the world 3,000 years ago, there are probably going to be some questions that I ask that weren't burning questions for the author, and some questions that the author asked that aren't burning questions for me.

So, while I'm troubled by the lack of due process here, that's just not something this author seemed to be concerned about.

That doesn't mean it was right or wrong, that's just what you're dealing with when you're trying to deal with 3,000 years and half a world away. So I come to this saying, my questions about how due process do trouble me, they're not answered here, can I set that aside and learn the lessons that do seem to concern the author to make sure I at least get that from this text.

So that's how I'm approaching it. I'm saying, yeah, I don't see the due process, that seems like a big deal to me. That's not the thing that was on the author of Samuel's mind, let's try and learn the lessons that were on that author's mind.

The thing that strikes me about what David does here is, in the contrast I see, Saul basically says, I have power, I'm responsible for advancing Israel's interests, I have an opportunity to do that by using my power, I'm going to do that.

[40 : 38] I have power, I've got a big army, I have interests, I want more land, I have an opportunity, the Gibeonites are weak, so I'm going to kill them off and take their land. That is a very human way of dealing with power.

That's why we say the power corrupts. Contrast that to what David is doing here. David says, I have people, they're in a family that they don't deserve, I have Gibeonites, they suffered an injustice they didn't deserve, I have a covenant with Jonathan, I owe him things, I have Saul, who never got the funeral that his office said he should have deserved, nor did Jonathan get the funeral that he really did deserve.

How can I use the power that God has given me in a way that does right by each of those different people?

And it seems, as I read this passage, like the narrator's fairly impressed that David found a way to answer the Gibeonites' concerns without violating his covenant with Jonathan, that God accepted as good enough to restore rain to the land, and he was able to honor the family of Saul such that it wasn't like people saw the family as cursed, but recognized that this is all about Saul and his administration as opposed to the broader community that Saul came from.

And so I look at this as a story about David using the power God gave him to creatively be faithful to everybody around him.

[42 : 42] And that is a lesson that makes sense of pretty much the whole of Samuel. You go back, just take 2 Samuel real quickly, this idea of faithfulness is very much the major lesson that explains almost every passage, particularly in 2 Samuel.

David wants to be faithful to God. He's troubled by the fact that he has a palace and God has a tent. And so he's like, what does it look like for me to be faithful in this situation? I want to build God a temple.

God says, nice try, I like camping, but because you have your heart in the right spot, I'm going to make a covenant with you. You will have a dynasty that endures forever.

David wanted to be faithful to Jonathan. So he said, let's find out if there's anyone left of the descendant of Jonathan. He finds Mephibosheth. He says, Mephibosheth, I'm going to give you all the wealth that Saul accumulated as king.

That basically made Mephibosheth a real threat to David's own power. But he did it so he could be faithful to Jonathan. Then you have the sad, and then David, well, there are other stories where

David showed the same sort of faithfulness in the battlefield.

[44 : 05] Then when David has problems, it's always because he's faithless. David is faithless in breaking his marital vows and taking Bathsheba. He's particularly faithless in the way he treats Uriah, who's a real picture of faithfulness in saying, I don't want to abandon my men on the field.

I'm not going to do anything that would dishonor them. He's faithless when he puts his own family ahead of the rest of the people as seen through the stories of Tamar and Abnon and Absalom.

And so you basically see that David at his best has a remarkable grasp of what it means to be faithful to God and faithful to other people. That's why he doesn't seize power.

Because he's thinking in terms of not how can I advance my interests, but what is consistent with honoring all the people around me that God has put in my life.

So I see that as the big lesson here. That if the theme of Samuel can be summed up as power corrupts, and the question is, how can any king avoid being corrupted by that power?

[45 : 38] Samuel is pointing us towards it's this idea of being faithful that's going to be king. what does that mean for me today? Why did I say that this was a really helpful lesson for me to learn?

Essentially, the way I'm taking this is faithfulness here means look at the people around you, find a creative way to honor each of their dignities. faithfulness. That's what faithfulness means.

Go through life saying, God put this person in my path, what does it look like for me to honor their dignity? And sometimes that's going to take a fair bit of creativity to deal with every situation that way.

That's what I see David doing in this passage, that's what I think the real lesson of Samuel is here. So, after I studied Samuel, I largely stopped praying in terms of, God, I'm in this tough spot, please show me the right answer so I don't have to deal with it.

And many more of my prayers became, God, please give me the creativity to learn how to honor all the people around me in this situation. I saw the goal was not how do I solve this problem and get out of the situation, but how do I make the tough decisions that God makes all the time as Cain?

[47 : 12] And through that, relate to him in this. Think deeply about, here are all the people you've put around me. What do each of them deserve?

What does each of their dignities require? How can I honor that? So that left, changed me from thinking in terms of solving problems to I need to relate to God in the position of making tough decisions.

things. The much bigger way though, of course, is that Samuel is still just trying to teach us what it means for God to be the great king.

God to God to love. And I look at this question of how do you find a creative way to show faithfulness to all the people around you?

And I want to emphasize this last bit about David throwing the state funeral for Saul. Saul was David's enemy. As I said before, Saul tried to kill David 16 times in this book.

[48 : 29] I don't have enemies like that, thank God. This is a story that teaches us something about how you deal with your enemies.

And the Bible is all about the question of how do you deal with your enemy? Because the essential issue of the Bible is that we are God's enemies, and this is how he's chosen to deal with us.

And he found the most creative way possible to solve that problem. Just like David doesn't deal with Saul according to the dignity Saul actually deserved as a vile tyrant and attempted murderer, an actual murderer, but dealt with Saul according to the dignity he ought to have had as a great king of Israel.

God's chosen to deal with us not according to the dignity we really deserve as depraved people that hate his kingship and turn from him, but according to the dignity we could have if we were the people he made us to be and could be if he changed our hearts.

And so God creatively said, I will die in your place, and thereby allow myself to make you the people you ought to be.

[49 : 54] do you understand what I'm saying? When God chose to send Jesus to die on the cross in your place, he was applying an incredible amount of creativity, how can a mortal God become flesh and die, to solve a problem, not about upholding the dignity you actually have, but the dignity you could have as his child.

And so I look at this passage and see that's where I see God's kingship. That's what David and Saul are revealing to me, is this is what it looks like to actually be a great king.

And most clearly, then I understand what's going on at the cross. I'm not a professional preacher, I'm just going to stop there.

So, let me pray. and then we'll have our closing song. God, I ask that each person in this room would find their heart filled with a desire love.

I ask you to have the sort of relationship with you that you want us to have. Lord, in the many trials you've chosen to put in our path, they would respond, we would respond, not by shying away from them or asking you to take us out, but by asking you to give us the purity of heart that recognizes what it looks like to be faithful to you and faithful to everyone around us.

[52 : 02] so that in growing to be a person of those values, we would more and more appreciate how glorious you are in your kingship every day.

We more and more understand the miracle of the cross and we would become closer and closer to you through that.

We thank you that you are such a great king. We thank you that you demonstrate that to us through the absurd solution to our problems of you yourself dying.

We thank you for choosing to live by the values of grace and mercy that motivated you to desire to do that for us.

We pray that you would make us likewise a people who treasure those attributes and so are more and more marked as a people made out in your character a people who look very much like Jesus.

[53 : 37] I pray these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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