

2 Samuel 20

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[0 : 0 0] Well, turn with me in a Bible, if you have one, to 2 Samuel chapter 20. If you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, it's page 272.

We have been going through the life of David in the book of 2 Samuel. And, you know, that song we sung is actually similar to what we'll get to in a couple weeks, David's song in chapter 22 where he talks about the Lord is my rock.

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer and all the things that David went through. At the end of the day, he could say, Lord, you are my rock. You are the reason I can sing praise.

So we're reading chapter 20 today. And I'm going to read verse 1 to 22 for us. So here we go.

Now, there happened to be there a worthless man whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, We have no portion in David.

[1 : 0 5] We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, O Israel. So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba, the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

And David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them, but did not go into them.

So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood. Then the king said to Amasa, who is the newly appointed leader of his army, Call the men of Judah together to me within three days and be here yourself.

So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him. And David said to Abishai, Now Sheba, the son of Bichri, will do us more harm than Absalom.

Take your Lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself to fortified cities and escape from us. And there went out after him Joab's men and the Karathites and the Pelathites and all the mighty men.

[2 : 0 6] They went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba, the son of Bichri. When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath, fastened on his thigh.

And as he went forward, it fell out. And Joab said to Amasa, Is it well with you, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand.

So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai, his brother, pursued Sheba, the son of Bichri. And one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab.

And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway, and anyone who came by seeing him stopped. And when the man saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field and threw a garment over him.

When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba, the son of Bichri. And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Bethmaca, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in.

[3 : 16] And all the men who were with Joab came and besieged him in Abel of Bethmaca. They cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart, and they were battering the wall to throw it down.

Then a wise woman called from the city, Listen, listen, tell Joab, come here, that I may speak with you. And he came near her, and the woman said, Are you Joab? He answered, I am. Then she said to him, Listen to the words of your servant.

And he answered, I am listening. Then she said, They used to say in former times, Let them but ask counsel at Abel. And so they settled a matter. I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel.

Why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord? Joab answered, Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy. That is not true. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim called Sheba, the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David.

Give him up alone, and I will withdraw from the city. And 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 Bichri, and threw it out to Joab.

[4 : 17] So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city every man to his home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king. So my wife and I live in the Worcester Square neighborhood, which, if you've been there, it's the historically Italian neighborhood of New Haven.

And we live in a housing complex that has a large population of older Italians. And occasionally, when I'm talking to one of our neighbors, they'll begin telling me about what the neighborhood was like when they grew up.

And they'll say, we had street festivals in the summer, lasted for days. They'd close down the whole street. They'd bring in musicians all the way from Italy.

And we had lots of kids in the neighborhood who would play ball after school every day. And we had the Businessmen's Association that would keep the streets clean. And then if you ask them about their experience in the neighborhood now, we'll talk about how all the kids have moved away.

There's more trash on the streets than there used to be because no one's there to clean it up on a regular basis. And the summer festivals are only a shadow of what they once were.

[5 : 25] And the Italian restaurant across the street is struggling. And the other one closed down last year. Now, it's not a bad neighborhood, right? There's still plenty of life going on there.

There's Pepe's and Sally's and a couple other Italian restaurants. There's a decent playground that our kids enjoy. But for many of my neighbors, their feeling is the Italian neighborhood, the Italian community in New Haven has survived, but it's not what it once was.

Now, there's a sense of survival and disappointment together at the same time. And that's actually what we see in our passage tonight is survival and disappointment in David's kingdom.

This is the conclusion, actually, of the main storyline of 2 Samuel. It's not the end of the book, but it's the end of the chronological narrative of David's reign. The next four chapters are a separate section that gather episodes from different portions of David's reign in the beginning, the middle, and the end.

But what we've seen so far in the story of David is this. Basically, three episodes. First, we've seen the rise of David in the first ten chapters of 2 Samuel, where he unifies the people.

[6 : 43] He defeats their enemies. He becomes king in Jerusalem. He reigns with justice and mercy, and God promises his throne will be established forever. It's a high point.

He's David's rise. And then the next eight chapters, we see David's fall, beginning with his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, her husband, and then the revolt of David's son Absalom, and David has to flee into the wilderness.

We see David's fall and his exile. But in chapter 19 and 20, the end of this narrative, we see his restoration and return. Absalom is killed, and so David is able to assume his position of authority once again.

He pardons his enemies. We saw that last week. And he returns to Jerusalem. And what we see here in chapter 20 is these two things. David's kingdom has survived.

It hasn't totally been destroyed. It's been through all kinds of difficulties. It's almost, it might have come close to completely disintegrating, but it's been kept together.

[7 : 55] But it's also not what it once was. And it never quite will be again what it was in those early chapters, those glory days.

Now, let me just walk through the chapter, show you how we see this dynamic, and then talk about what do we learn from it. So, verses 1 and 2, first thing we see is this guy Sheba.

And the author tells us exactly what we should think of him. The author says he was a worthless man. The author of Samuel doesn't normally characterize people that blatantly, but it's pretty obvious he's negative, right?

He's not somebody that we should like. And what he says is, forget David. Let's go our own way. It's actually the same refrain that two generations later, Jeroboam, who splits off and actually forms the northern kingdom of Israel, he says the same thing in 1 Kings chapter 12.

Every man to his tent, so Israel. We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. But, you know, if you've been here through the story of 2 Samuel, we've seen all kinds of people rising up against David.

[9 : 11] Abner, Ahizabel, Absalom. Here's another guy, right? Another rebellion. Well, then, chapter, verse 3.

So, we have another rebel, Sheba. Then, verse 3, David comes home to Jerusalem. So, David's had to leave Jerusalem, and finally he's journeyed all the way home.

But what's the one thing that the author points out that happens when he gets home in verse 3? The one detail he mentions is the ten concubines.

Now, these were David's concubines who had been left to take care of the palace when David left. And when Absalom came to Jerusalem, he violated David's concubines.

They had been dishonored and shamed. And so, what David does here, on the one hand, he protects them and he provides for them.

[10 : 09] He takes responsibility to care for them. All right? That's a good thing. But then it talks about, it says, the end of the verse says, So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.

Their lives have been ruined, right? They've been publicly dishonored, and David cannot fully heal the wound that they've experienced.

There's a real sadness in a way this is told, in the way that works out for them. And in both of these cases, with Sheba's rebellion and the concubine's loneliness, David might well have remembered the words of the prophet Nathan.

If you look back in chapter 12, verses 9 to 12, the prophet Nathan comes to him after he has committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged for Uriah to be killed.

And the prophet Nathan says, You've struck down Uriah with the sword. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house. And so, when Sheba again, another rebel arises, David would have been reminded again of what he had done to divide and to be disloyal to, actually one of his most loyal subjects to Uriah, in his kingdom.

[11 : 33] And that's coming back to him again in another way, that disloyalty and division. And then Nathan had said to David, You stole Uriah's wife, and somebody else is going to steal your wives, your concubines.

And that's what David experienced. David, God had forgiven David of his sin, but David was experiencing some of the long-term consequences of his disloyalty and unfaithfulness.

So, again, there's this sense of David's kingdom has survived, but there's this sadness and disappointment that it's not going to be what it was before. Now, most of the chapter is taken up with pursuing this guy Sheba.

In fact, if you look at verse 6, verse 7, verse 10, verse 13, it also talks, all those verses talk about pursuing Sheba. Now, long story, but it begins with David taking decisive action.

He says, this is not acceptable. We're not just going to let this guy tear apart the kingdom. Justice needs to be done. So, he sends Amasa, who is his newly appointed army chief, to gather the people against Sheba.

[12 : 46] But David's plan doesn't actually work the way he intends it to. First of all, Amasa takes too long. David only gave him three days, so maybe Amasa was a new guy, and people didn't want to listen to him right away.

Maybe, for whatever reason, he wasn't able to gather a sufficient force, and so he delayed. And then David's like, this isn't good to delay. We can't delay. We need to deal with this right now. And that's probably a good thing, right?

David had delayed a long, long, long, long time with Absalom, with bad consequences, and he doesn't delay. That's a good thing. So, he sends Abishai instead. But then, what happens?

That doesn't work out the way David wants it to either. As the story develops, who takes center stage? Whose name starts appearing over and over and over in the story? Joab.

Now, Joab was the army commander for most of David's reign. David had just replaced Joab with Amasa. Joab was not happy that he was demoted.

[13 : 53] Right? You ever been demoted? You've been the boss, and now you're the subordinate at work? Most people just leave. Right?

Right? Joab didn't have a choice. Right? So, he's got to stay in the army. He doesn't have any other workplace where he can go. But Joab is not happy. And so, when Joab happens to meet Amasa, Joab decides to deal with him right away by getting rid of him, by murdering him.

Joab takes things into his own hands, and he murders the man that David has just put in charge of his whole army. And then Joab and his brother Abishai take over pursuing Sheba.

We see that Amasa has to be literally carried out of the way in order for people to follow Joab. Right? We see the injustice of it all. Now, in the end, what do we see?

Well, Sheba's rebellion was contained. Sheba didn't actually seem to gather that much of a following after all. Abel Beth Maka was sort of as far north as you could get in Israel. So, it seems like he sort of raised the flag and said, Everyone to his tents, O Israel!

[15 : 08] And he runs north, and he just keeps going until he gets to the edge of Israel, and he's in this sort of lonesome city up there.

So, his rebellion didn't actually turn out to be that much. But, his rebellion was contained, right? Joab besieges the city, and Sheba is...

The woman intervenes and says, Let's save a city from... Let's save us all from getting killed. And so, Sheba is killed.

The war ends, and Joab returns to Jerusalem to the king. Right? So, Sheba's dealt with, but Joab is never dealt with. Right? Joab... I mean, as far as we see, Sheba...

We don't even have a record that Sheba actually murdered anyone. Right? Sheba just called for a rebellion. Joab actually murdered someone that the king had put in charge of the army. Joab returns to Jerusalem to the king.

[16 : 08] Nothing happens. So, we see this irony, right? Sheba's rebellion is contained, but Joab is unrestrained. Right? And David seems powerless to do anything about it.

Now, if you go and look down at verse 23, there's a summary of the officials in David's administration. I want you to turn back to chapter 8, where there is a similar summary at the end of chapter 8.

So, at the end of chapter 8 is in sort of the glory days of David's reign, when he reigned with justice and righteousness and victorious over his enemies and with kindness and mercy.

Chapter 8, verse 15 to 18, is a list of David's officials. It begins with the words, Now, keep your finger in there.

Go back to the end of chapter 20. It's almost the same list. Joab's over the army. Benaiah over the Carathites and Pelathites, the mighty men.

[17 : 30] There's a new guy, Adorim, in charge of forced labor. That's probably not a good sign when basically the king has to institute a draft because there's not enough people who are willing to serve.

But there's no comment on that. But that's probably showing a development. And then there's a few other minor name changes. Some people may have died and been replaced by others or whatever.

But what's missing if you compare these two summaries, one from the glory days in the beginning and one at the end? The first sentence in chapter 8 is conspicuously missing.

That first sentence that says, David reigned over all Israel with justice and equity. And that sentence is absent in chapter 20.

Right? To be sure, David's still the rightful king. Chapter 20, verse 22, Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king. He's still the king. But his reign is not characterized by justice and equity anymore.

[18 : 46] It's been too compromised. And so the author can't say that in such an unqualified way. Right? There's been a terrible injustice done to Amasa and nothing is done about it.

Amasa has been murdered in cold blood. There is no justice that David carries out against Joab. And so we see David's kingdom has been weakened.

It's survived, but it's not what it once was. And this is where the chronological story of David in the book of Samuel ends. And it continues in 1 Kings.

But that pretty much starts with arranging for Solomon to be the successor. So survival and disappointment. Now, the book of 2 Samuel is not unique in the Bible in ending this way.

In fact, if you read the whole Old Testament, if you think of the big story of the whole Old Testament, it follows almost the exact same pattern. God calls the people of Israel, right?

[19 : 58] He brings them into the promised land. They're sort of their rise with people like David and some of the great kings and establishing them in the promised land.

They rise to prominence and then they fall into sin and ultimately they're exiled. Like David had to leave Jerusalem, the people of Israel have to leave and are exiled into Babylon.

And then what happens 70 years later? They return. They're restored. If you go to Ezra or Nehemiah or the end of... Or Ezra or Nehemiah or some of the later prophets, it talks about the return to Jerusalem.

But what do you... When you read those books, have you ever read those books? They're marked by the same sentiment. Survival and disappointment.

God's kept the people of Israel together. They haven't been totally destroyed in the exile, but they come home and people look at the new temple and they're like, it's not as glorious as it once was.

[21 : 08] And the kingdom is never restored. And Nehemiah and Ezra are frustrated at the people's ongoing unfaithfulness.

And so there's these great promises, right? In the whole Old Testament, there's these great promises. God's saying, I'm going to establish a people for myself in this world.

I'm going to display my glory to the nations of the world. And then the promises seem so minimally fulfilled.

And you wonder, what's going on? Why is there... Why does it end? Why does the Old Testament end with survival but also disappointment? And before I answer that, let me ask, isn't that also the situation that we sometimes find ourselves in?

In our own lives? I mean, think about looking back. Think about how God sustained you. How He's forgiven you of your sins. How He's held you in His hands.

[22 : 15] How He's kept you through trials. And you've survived. But I think especially as you get older, you look back on the past and you might feel some regret.

You might still, like David, be enduring some of the consequences of past sin that God has forgiven you for. But you still feel some of the bitter effects of it.

Maybe you have ongoing frustration and anxiety. Maybe work hasn't turned out the way you've hoped. Maybe your family hasn't turned out the way you've hoped.

Maybe your relationships haven't turned out the way you've hoped. And you look back and you feel like, I had hopes.

I had longings. And some of those probably aren't going to happen. Or you feel disappointed. And you wonder what to do with that.

[23 : 19] How do I walk with God while I'm feeling this disappointment? These great promises about what it means to be a Christian and to be united with Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit living inside me.

And the reality of my life day to day just seems hard. And it doesn't get easier. I was talking to somebody recently and they said, you know, I just thought I wouldn't have to face this many difficulties altogether.

I thought I had passed those by at an earlier point in my life. And now I feel like it's more trouble than I've had to face ever before.

And is that, or is that true in, in, for, is that sometimes true for the church as a whole, right? I feel the same sense of survival and disappointment.

Jesus promised, I'll build my church. The gates of hell won't stand against it. Jesus prayed that his followers would be one. The church has survived for 2,000 years. You can read church history. It's expanded throughout all the world.

[24 : 35] But sometimes the church disappoints. Sometimes there's people like Sheba who cause divisions and upheaval.

People like the ten concubines who've been hurt by others' sin. And it seems like their wounds can never be fully healed this side of heaven. People like Joab who claim loyalty to God's anointed king, but can be very harsh and very unforgiving.

Maybe sometimes you look around at church and you just think, well, it's all right. I'm here again. It's another Sunday night. There's 30 or 40 of us here.

It's okay. I mean, it's not bad. We've survived. But it's not glorious. Your heart isn't enraptured with joy. Now, I'm trying to strike a balance here because I don't want to create the impression that we're always going to be feeling disappointment all the time about everything.

Right? We don't have to be like Eeyore. Okay? Who is always moping around complaining about how gray the sky is and why it's always raining.

[25 : 56] Right? There is real joy and victory and healing in the Christian life. And sometimes those things are worth celebrating and embracing. But disappointment and sadness are also inescapable.

You will not be able to escape disappointment and sadness as a human being living in this fallen world and as an imperfect Christian living in an imperfect church.

And there ain't any other options in this world. All right? No matter how hard you try, you won't be fully satisfied by what this world has to offer, even by what the church has to offer in this present age.

Now, sometimes we don't recognize that. Sometimes we attach ourselves to something. We sort of go from one thrill to another, one project to another, one ambition to another.

We always have something. And this thing is going to be it. This thing is going to satisfy me. This relationship is going to satisfy me. Marriage is going to satisfy me. And then you get to some points and you think, it's harder than I expected.

[27 : 08] And it's not all that I always hoped it would be. How do I deal with that? Do I just leave and ditch faith and become cynical and decide I don't believe in anything?

What do we do? C.S. Lewis wrote this in Mere Christianity. He said, If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy this desire, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise or to be unthankful for these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them, for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy or echo or mirage.

I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death. I must never let it get snowed under or turn aside.

I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others do the same. The book of Hebrews, chapter 11, talks about people of faith, people who had faith in God's promises, and it describes them this way.

[28 : 48] It describes Abraham this way. It says, He was living in tents. He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. And it goes on.

It says, These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, having acknowledged they were strangers and exiles on the earth. They desire a better country, a heavenly one.

Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. And that's what the end of David's story is meant to teach us.

God sustains David through his rise and fall, and he brings him back home again.

But it's never quite what it once was, because it's meant to point us forward. It's meant to point us forward to a greater kingdom to come and to a better country than the Israel that David lived in or the country that we live in or any other country in this world.

[29 : 58] In the end of the Bible, the book of Revelation points us forward to a day when God's promises will be fulfilled and when we won't be disappointed.

If you look at Revelation chapter 21, we're going to end there. Turn there if you want. End of the Bible. Revelation 21 gives us this vision of God's kingdom to come that we can be part of through Jesus.

It says, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away.

[31 : 08] And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. This is the promise the Bible leaves us with.

That one day, Jesus Christ is going to come and make all things new. And all of our disappointments in the limitations and the realities of this fallen world, all of those are meant to point us forward toward that future promise, toward that future hope, to not let us get too comfortable in this world, because this world as it is, this present evil age is only temporary.

And it's not where we're meant to find our final satisfaction and happiness. And so every time that you feel disappointment, it's meant to point you forward toward the future that God has promised.

Now you might think, Okay, that sounds nice, but how do I know that's real? How is that not just mythical, nice-sounding, Christian lingo?

Well, the way you can know it's real is how the story of Jesus ended. Right? If you look at David's story, it was rise, fall, partial restoration.

[32 : 48] If you look at the Old Testament story, rise, fall, partial restoration, and also disappointment. But what happens in Jesus' life? Jesus comes on the scene, He rises to public prominence, He's baptized, and God the Father says, This is my Son, whom I'm well pleased with, the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus' glory appears in His glory.

But then what happens? Now, unlike David, unlike the people of Israel, Jesus doesn't fall because of His own sin. But Jesus is betrayed, like David was.

Jesus is ultimately crucified. But then what's the end? The end is not a partial restoration that's sort of disappointing, and that makes you think the glory days were in the past.

No. Jesus' life ends with resurrection. Right? On Easter morning, the disciples come to the tomb, and they think, the best has already passed.

And the angel comes to them and says, He's not here. He's risen. And because He's risen, you too will rise again as well.

[34 : 09] And because He rose from the dead, that's the promise that one day He'll come and make everything new. And He'll make our lives new, and He'll make the world new, and it'll be glorious.

And that resurrection hope is what sustains us when this world disappoints. So even when life as a Christian is harder than you thought it would be, even if you get older and things get harder rather than easier, even if opportunities pass you by and you think, I will never have that opportunity again.

Remember Jesus' death for your sins. That's how we can be forgiven. And remember His resurrection, and that's the promise of future hope that He'll one day make all things new.

And that gives us the strength to keep walking and not give up and not grow cynical and not lose heart, but to keep walking even when life is disappointing and look to our King Jesus who leads us every step along the way.

Well, we're coming to celebrate the Lord's table, communion. And communion is, on the one hand, it looks forward. It's a promise of the banquet feast that we'll come, that we'll participate in when Jesus comes again.

[35 : 52] But it's also Jesus saying to us, I am with you. I am with you every step of the way. As you take and eat the bread and drink the cup, just as much as you take those things and they go into your body, Jesus has sent His Spirit to dwell in your hearts.

And as you take hold of Him by faith, as we eat and drink tonight, you can be assured that Jesus will be with you through every disappointment and that through Him you will survive, that He won't let you perish being connected to Him, but that through every disappointment He will be leading you toward His heavenly kingdom.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for the life of David. We thank You for how in him we see some of what a true king ought to be, what a great leader ought to be in His kindness and mercy and justice and righteousness that we see in much of his life.

though, Lord, we thank You but, Lord, we thank You also that You show us in David's failure and even in his restoration, though, with disappointment.

We thank You that You show us that You point us forward to what is to come. You point us forward to Your Son, Jesus Christ and to His coming again.

[37 : 37] where we will never be disappointed. So, Lord, we pray that You would sustain our hope and our faith as we take and eat the bread and the cup tonight. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Well, as I said, we're going to take and eat the bread and the cup in communion.

if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, if you have turned to Him and called upon Him as your Savior and Lord, then you are welcome to take the bread and the cup as they'll be passed around tonight.

If you're not a Christian believer here, we ask that you not take the bread and the cup because they signify trusting in Jesus. but instead, take this time if that's you, just pass them by and that's just fine.

But take this time to reflect on where you are with God and even to pray and consider taking Jesus Christ Himself.

[38 : 49] Let me read from 1 Corinthians Paul's words about the Lord's