

2 Samuel 12: 1-31.

The last time we saw David he had completed his cover up of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. Her husband was dead, the pregnancy had attracted no suspicion and life at the palace had returned to normal. But as the final verse of chapter 11 states: *the thing David had done displeased the Lord*. And chapter 12 begins: *The Lord sent Nathan to David*.

Although David deserves to die Nathan will inform him that this will not happen. (13) *The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die*. It will become clear later that the Lord has taken away his sin and given it to his Son. (see Romans 3:25)

This chapter though will reveal that sin pays terrible wages. The consequences of David's actions will be threefold:

(10) The sword shall never depart from your house. David's family are going to become a war zone.

(11) Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. (see 2 Sam 16:21,22)

(14) The son born to you will die. This will have painful implications for Bathsheba.

We are being shown these things that we will learn to fear sin.

The chapter also defines sin for us. Our attention is redirected from adultery and murder to something else. (9) *Why did you despise the word of the Lord.....(10) the sword shall never depart from your house because you despised me....(14) by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord*. There is a process going on here. Who would have thought David of all people would end up showing utter contempt for the Lord. It began though by despising the word of the Lord.

God's word is our life line in a world of temptation and sin. The mercy of God is expressed in sending Nathan. With courage and skill this man springs the trap and shows David himself. David meets himself as the ruthless, greedy, wicked rich man in the story. It is a moment of deep distress but the start of his restoration. The rebukes of God's word are life giving. We should welcome them.

David's repentance is marked by humility. He prays for his sick child and comforts Bathsheba on her loss. But the surprise at the end is the Lord's provision of Solomon. He comes with this simple statement: *The Lord loved him*. (24) How unexpected and surprising is God's grace.

- All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. What is our reaction to the rebukes of God's word?
- Behaviour matters. It's good to rejoice that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus but fighting sin is not merely a godly thing to do it is a safe thing.
- Allow yourself to be amazed by God's grace and ask yourself how we should respond to those who have sinned conspicuously.

2 Samuel 13: 1-22

Nathan had announced to David, *"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me."* (2 Sam 12:10). These chapters reveal the cost of David's sin as it's worked out in the life of his family. Sin is never a private matter. A father's behaviour affects the lives of his children.

This is a deeply appalling incident. Amnon, the crown prince rapes his half sister Tamar. Verse 1 describes him 'falling in love' with his Tamar. The rest of the chapter implies this has far more to do with lust than love. We are being shown here the potential 'harm' arising from entertaining lustful thoughts.

Amnon is in a bad place for two reasons. He has an advisor (his cousin) who will supply him with diabolical advice. Jonadab will devise a plan that won't be refused which will allow Amnon to do what he wants to his sister. Who would refuse a sick man his wish to be cared for by his sister? In addition to this he has a father whose influence on his life is in the debit column. (see below) Proverbs warns us over our 'friends' and has things to say about parents and discipline

The horror of the incident doesn't finish with the rape. V15 highlights a surprising consequence. *Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact he hated her more than he had loved her.* Amnon's obsession once satisfied turns into a vile loathing. Hatred becomes the prevailing emotion in the chapter with terrible consequences. Amnon hates Tamar. Absalom hates Amnon (22) Despising Gods word (12:9) opens a Pandora's box of evil consequences.

The section ends with David's fury but sadly nothing more. His scandalous behaviour with Bathsheba has disabled his ability to discipline his family. It seems to have been a feature of David's dealings with his children (1 Kings 1:6) It is a recurring theme in these books of Samuel first surfacing in the behaviour of Eli with his own wayward sons.

- Proverbs urges us to take care over our friends. *Walk with the wise and become wise for a companion of fools suffers harm. (Prov 13:20) Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Prov 27:6)* What might you have said to Amnon?
- Proverbs urges parents to exercise discipline. *Whoever spares the rod hates their children but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them. (Prov 13:24) A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebukes. (Prov 13:1)*

2 Samuel 13:23-39

The rest of 2 Samuel is preoccupied with the succession of the monarchy. We have already been introduced to Solomon who will accede to the throne in place of his father with the assurance that the Lord's favour rested on him (12:24) What these chapters disclose is how the other members of the royal family disqualify themselves.

The previous section ends with Absalom's hatred of his step brother. But for 2 years this remains a silent seething hatred that Absalom keeps concealed. *...he never said a word to Amnon either good or bad. (22).* There is a reason why Jesus in the context of teaching on the 6th commandment (You shall not murder) addresses the issue of anger.

Plotting and scheming would seem to be the theme of these chapters. There are similarities between Amnon's behaviour towards Tamar and Absalom's actions in setting up the assassination. He invites the King and his sons to a celebration. He must have suspected the King would refuse his request but having done would find it harder to refuse his desire to have Amnon join the party.

We get a glimpse of the dark side of Absalom's character here. His action exceeds the law of revenge that allows only an eye for an eye. He is careful not to do the dark deed himself but subcontracts it to others.

Although David fears the worst and that all his sons are dead, it will emerge that only Amnon has died. The chapter ends with a desire on David's part to be reconciled to his son

Absalom but he will not know how to bring it about, with tragic consequences. The fall out from this event will lead in due course to the civil war with will shake the kingdom and leave many dead.

- Don't let hatred fester. Either we are to apply Matt 18 *If your brother sins against you go and point out their fault.* Or we deal with ourselves in line with 1 Peter. *Above all, love one another deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins (4:8)*
- There is no mention of the Lord anywhere in chapter 13. He is not sought nor is he heard to speak. Sinful anger and human fear are in the driving seat. They desperately need to relearn to fear the Lord. Are we intentionally seeking God and his ways in our difficulties and disappointments?

2 Samuel 14:1-21

The sadness in David's family mounts. His daughter Tamar has been violated by her step brother. Amnon the perpetrator has been murdered and Absalom who exacted revenge has fled to Geshur. He has been there for 3 years. During this time David has mourned the death of Amnon and now mourns over the broken relationship with Absalom

In the encounter with the woman from Tekoa she will compare him to 'an angel from God in discerning good and evil' (17,20) But David cuts a sorry figure in these chapters. He is not functioning as a king far less an angel from God. Turn the clock back a few years and we see King David in command. He knows what do around the death of Abner and Ishbosheth. His actions promote unity in the fractured kingdom. Now though he is not in command of his own family. It is a reminder of how great our dependence on God's grace and wisdom is. These things are not to be taken for granted or despised.

In a situation not dissimilar to the approach of Nathan in chapter 12 a women comes to David with a sad scenario over which she appeals for the King's help. This widowed woman's two sons have fought, leading to the death of one of them. The clan are now set on executing vengeance with the prospect of leaving the woman's dead husband with neither name or descendants. The 'problem' is then skilfully moved from the widow's anguish to the plight of David's family. It is though 'a put up job'. The woman is following instructions for Joab.

Joab is playing an increasingly influential role in the life of the nation. Following the murder of Abner, David commented: *And today though I am the anointed king I am weak and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me.* (3:39) If that was true then how much more now. And although Joab's actions in working to have Absalom reconciled to his father seems a generous thing it will set the stage for the palace *coup* and the civil war.

- This period in David's life acts like a warning. Living submissively within Gods constraints is both wise and safe.
- Wisdom comes from God. We need to continually look to and rely on him to supply it.
- Whose advice are we heeding at present?

2 Samuel 14:22-33

Absalom is readmitted to the capital but not to the King's presence. Joab's wish to restore Absalom is only partially realised. David is unwilling to punish him but equally unwilling to forgive him. He opts for a middle way which will turn out to be the worst of all possible worlds. The rift at the heart of the royal family is evident and the situation festers.

In a section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus addressed issues of conflict (murder and anger) he said: *If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them then come and offer your gift. (Matt 5:23,24)* Jesus emphasises the urgency of addressing broken relationships. They are not to be allowed to fester.

We are introduced here to Absalom's looks. (25,26) It points to his vanity - who weighs their hair? (26) Note that his hair will contribute to his downfall (see 18:9). The narrator is preparing the way for Absalom's charm offensive in chapter 15 (2-6). Absalom stands in contrast to his father who was appointed by God for the condition of his heart not the attractiveness of his outward appearance.

Absalom engineers an audience with the King. The chapter ends with the sentence: *And the king kissed Absalom. (33)* From one angle it brings to an end the turmoil of chapter 13 & 14. But David's kiss merely confirms to his son that he has no part in his father's plans. He will have to make his own.

- Are there broken relationships I am tempted to avoid addressing. Do I need to hear Jesus urgent instructions?
- Our culture makes appearance an issue of paramount importance. Yet appearance can provide a very poor index to someone's true value. What impresses us?
- David's forgiveness is incomplete. His son is allowed back into the city but not into his affection. Jesus parable of forgiveness (Matt 18:21-35) uses the phrase '*forgive your brother or sister from your heart*' (35) This is what gospel forgiveness requires of us.

2 Samuel 15:1-12

The chapter begins with the words, "*In the course of time....*" We are approaching the climax of these chapters when Absalom will make his bid for the throne. The writer has kept us informed of the passage of time during this process. Absalom waits 2 years before avenging his sisters rape. (13:23) He then spends 3 years in exile. (13:38) He returns to Jerusalem but is denied access to the king for 2 years. (14:28). And now 4 years have passed since his return. (15:7). David may have been tempted to think the worst was over and that by not taking decisive action over any of these offences life had returned to some form of normality. But these chapters act as a warning alerting us to the power of unresolved sin to fester dangerously.

And so (Absalom) stole the hearts of the people of Israel (6)

Absalom's charm offensive seems to exploit a short coming in David's justice system. His son intercepts those coming with grievances and meets them with sympathy and support. (3,4) His concern for them is contrasted with the 'closed' sign on the doors of David's officials. In addition he flatters those coming to pay him respect with a show of camaraderie. (5) He is for sure the 'people's Prince'. Proverbs warns us of the danger of flattery. *Those who flatter their neighbours are spreading a net for their feet. (Prov 29:5)*

David seems detached and out of touch with what is going on. It would be hard to regard Absalom's move to acquire a chariot with 50 men to run ahead of him (1), as innocent. Did the king not wonder why no one came to him with their disputes any more. And did Absalom's request to fulfil a four year old vow really not attract any suspicion? David is in retirement but his enemies remain active. In a passage about pressing on and continuing to grow the writer to the Hebrews urges: *We want each of you to show the same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for maybe fully realized. We do not want you to*

become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (Heb 6:11,12)

- Because sin has a habit of festering the Bible urges us to deliberately deal with relational difficulties. This is located in a family. Its where we need to begin.
- Beware flattery. Wisdom is found in those who welcome rebuke. How well do we handle correction?
- There is no retirement in the spiritual life. We are to be diligent to the very end.

2 Samuel 15: 13-37

It is at this point in the narrative that the King comes to life. From the time of his adultery with Bathsheba 11:1 David has looked uncertain and tentative. Now though he takes command again. At the news of Absalom's move, he knows what to do. (14) The rest of the chapter comprises a series of conversations and in each of them David directs affairs. It is a reminder that David's ability to rule is not innate but God given. His failure to act as Gods king has led to his temporary loss of these gifts. In NT terms we would describe this as the grieving of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30) We live our lives dependent on God's grace at all times.

The first conversation takes place with Ittai the Gittite. David opens the door for him to return on the grounds that he is a foreigner, he doesn't owe David anything and the cost of siding with the King looks high. But Ittai swears powerful allegiance to David. (21) He stands in stark contrast to Absalom David's treacherous son.

David then encounters Zadok the priest who meets him along with the Levites carrying the ark of God. The King refuses to use the ark as a 'lucky charm' (1 Sam 4:3) and instead submits himself to God's sovereignty. *"Take the ark back into the city. If I find favour in the Lord's eyes he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again."* (25)

Being convinced of Gods sovereignty is not a substitute for action. The return of Zadok to the city with the ark provides an opportunity to embed some informers. (27b,28). The news that Ahithophel had defected to Absalom was a body blow. But it prompts prayer: *Lord turn Ahithophel's counsel to foolishness.* (31) The prayer is answered by the arrival of the people at the summit where they are met by Hushai the Arkite. He is sent back to ingratiate himself into Absalom's inner circle and specifically to contradict the advice of Ahithophel.

- The Bible never tires of reminding us of the lesson Jesus taught his disciples: *apart from me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5)
- Being clear about our complete dependence on the grace of the Lord Jesus is not intended to become an excuse for inaction. David flees, prays, plans and directs operations.
- The scene is one of a funeral procession. *But David continued up the Mount of Olives weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot.* He knows what the cost of these events is going to be. It is a reminder of another king who would tread that same route and who also would weep over Jerusalem and the choices it had made. (Luke 19:37,41)

2 Samuel 16:1-14

Thus far the encounters have been positive. David has been encouraged by the loyalty of Ittai, the submission of Zadok and the potential of Hushai's presence in the capital. Now

though two people will cross his path whose influence will be negative. Both are connected to Saul.

Ziba the opportunist. When David restored the private property of Saul to his grandson Mephibosheth, he also appointed Ziba to serve and manage his affairs. Ziba was a man of standing in his own right. He had 15 sons and 20 servants (9:10) When David is forced to flee he seizes his opportunity. Armed with a supply train of goods he is quick to cast his master in a bad light. (3) Mephibosheth will contradict Ziba's version of events on David's return (19:24-29). The impression left is that whereas Ziba is after the property what matters to Mephibosheth is his relationship with the King. *Let him take everything now that my Lord the king has returned home safely. (19:30)* In that he has things to teach us.

Shimei the curser. He emerges onto the hillside to pelt David and his followers with stones and curses. Shimei believes David is being repaid by God for *"all the blood you shed in the household of Saul..... You have come to ruin because you are a murderer."* (8) David will turn down the offer of Abishai to deal with Shimei. It seems a somewhat absurd situation. One man tracks alongside an army showering them with stones and dirt and pronouncing loud curses and no one is sent to silence him.

Shimei's assessment of these events may have the wrong cause (David's violence towards Saul) but he is not wrong in calling David a murderer and underlining that this is God's doing. That is why David rejects Abishai's proposal. God has indeed appointed this man to curse. And his hope is not in his ability to silence him but rather it's in his request *"that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore me to his covenant blessing..."* (12)

- Property or the King's presence, are we with Ziba or Mephibosheth?
- Sometimes we have to recognise events in our lives as a result of God's discipline. David would teach us not to try to merely improve our circumstances but rather to deal with the Lord.
- And these events teach us that no matter what we have done or where we find ourselves with the Lord there is always hope.

2 Samuel 16:15-23

As David and his supporters arrive exhausted at the Jordan attention moves back to the capital. Here the stage is set for the critical issue: whose advice will Absalom listen to. He will have in his war cabinet two of David's key players. Ahithophel his strategist and Hushai his confidant. One has transferred his loyalty the other has not. Who will Absalom choose to listen to?

As Hushai manoeuvres himself into position he is questioned by Absalom. *"So this is the love you show your friend? If he is your friend, why didn't you go with him."* (17) In 15:37 and 16:16 Hushai is referred to as David's *confidant*. Literally the word is 'friend'. The question is, 'what do true friends do?' The *love* in question here is God's loyal or steadfast love. Shouldn't friends reflect something of that in their relationships with one another. Ultimately though we rely on the Lord's covenant love as the one sure foundation for our lives.

Absalom's problem is he has opted for the world of lies and treachery. He serves as a warning that to become complacent about truth is to condemn yourself to a world fraught with insecurity and uncertainty. He is unable to resist Hushai's affirmation that he is God's man and having loyally served the father he now wants the opportunity to serve the son. Hushai is moving into position.

Ahithophel is asked for his advice about the next move and urges Absalom to leave no one in any doubt about the impossibility of there being any 'going back'. By sleeping with his

father's harem he will make himself utterly obnoxious to David. (21) It is no more though than the outworking of Gods judgment on the house of David. *This is what the Lord says: Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. (12:11)* Lots of things are subject to changing circumstances the word of the Lord is not one of them.

- Jesus said that if we hold to his teaching we will know the truth (John 8:31,32) In a world full of lies and illusions this surely is a wise approach.
- In the Bible we have a sure word that we don't need to question or doubt that it means what it says. *Your statutes are my delight; they are my counsellors (Psalm 119:24)*

2 Samuel 17:1-23

In the battle of the advisors Ahithophel is first to speak. His advice stresses speed and his strategy is to target only the King. In the light of what we know from the previous chapter (v14 *The king and all his people with him arrived at their destination exhausted*) it is clearly a wise plan.

Absalom though reveals his immaturity in governing by turning to Hushai for confirmation of the way to go. And by informing Hushai of the Ahithophel plan he gives him something to work off.

Hushai could have made his point in a few sentences but instead he uses a series of vivid metaphors. Bears robbed of her cubs, brave men who have the hearts of lions, Israel as numerous as the sand on the sea shore, a city whose walls will be dragged down to the valley with not so much as a pebble left. Hushai's speech slows the whole process down. Ahithophel counsels speed, Hushai plays for time.

Hushai knows his opponent. He targets Absalom's pride. *So I advise you: let all Israel from Dan to Beersheba - as numerous as the sand on the seashore be gathered to you with you yourself leading them into battle. (11)* And what's more mobilising Israel was a process that would take some time.

Hushai's advice carries the day but we are left in no doubt why. Significantly Ahithophel's counsel is referred to as 'good' (14) but it is rejected because *For the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.* Once again we are reminded of the prayer David prayed in 15:31.

The rest of the chapter reveals how the information is conveyed to David and it then records the death of Ahithophel. (23). This event is not presented to arouse our sympathy. Ahithophel is a traitor. David conveys some of the pain in Psalm 41:9. *Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.* These words are then applied in John 13:18 to Judas. We are being reminded whose camp Ahithophel belongs in.

- The best advice doesn't always sound the most exciting or promise to make us look good. We are being reminded how much we depend on the Lord's help in deciding who to listen to.
- That God is with us in some project does not ensure it is trouble free. Difficulty arose for those entrusted with communicating the news to David. His ways may include risk and discomfort.
- Treachery and disloyalty are regarded as serious sins in Gods order of things.

2 Samuel 17:24 - 18:18

Chapter 17 ends with Absalom organising his forces and David being resupplied. It serves to emphasise Absalom's fatal mistake. The opportunity to attack the exhausted army (29) and kill their vulnerable leader has now gone. David is secure in Mahanaim (Ishbosheth's centre of operation when he succeeded Saul, so likely fortified) and the army is replenished. Their failure to heed Ahithophel's advice will prove deadly.

Chapter 18 contains information on the conflict between the two sides. But it provides little detail of the actual fighting (6-8). We are invited to listen to the King address his army as they head out to war. This though is no rousing performance looking to stiffen the resolve of his men. David speaks more as father than king. "*Be gentle with the young man for my sake*" (5) What matters to David at this point is not his crown, still less his pleasures but rather his broken family. The word of God warns us, through the bad choices of others, what our first priorities should be. And notice there is a point at which the window of opportunity will close.

Absalom's death is described in some detail. (9-15). We are told *Absalom happened to meet David's men* (9). His vanity plays a part in his downfall as his prodigious hair catches in the branches of a tree and leaves him helpless. And his fate is sealed when Joab learns of his plight. All of this is the outworking of 17:14 *The Lord had determined to bring disaster on Absalom*. David may be the king but he has no control over Joab. His failure to sanction Joab for his murder of Abner and even worse his use of Joab to have Uriah killed in battle have left David seriously 'wounded'. We need a better king than David.

Absalom's life is commemorated in two places. There is a monument and a heap of stones but no children to continue his name. (14:27 mentions 3 unnamed sons - we must presume they have predeceased their father) And all of this is the tragic outworking of David's sin with Bathsheba.

- Thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David who rules over his people at all times with wisdom and grace.
- Can I take a warning? These chapters show us the terrible wages of sin. In a world full of temptation we stand in need of the Bible's regular reminder to watch and pray.
- There is a lot here about fathers and children and what we pass onto the next generation. Think carefully about the impact of your life on those around.

2 Samuel 18:19-33

The action moves from the battlefield to the matter of communicating the situation to the absent King. We find ourselves caught up in the mixed emotion of these events. Ahimaaz is eager to run with the news that Absalom's army is defeated and David's throne is secure. But Joab knows this victory will be more bitter than sweet and he seeks to head the eager young man off.

The tension is allowed to build as the writer describes in detail the progress of the messengers. We are invited to feel David's anxiety as the runners approach. Ahimaaz delivers his ecstatic news: *Praise be to the Lord your God! He has delivered up those who lifted their hands to my lord the king.* (28) It leaves David unmoved; there is only one thing on his mind: *Is the young man Absalom safe?* (29)

At the news of his son's death the floodgates of David's emotions open. *O my son Absalom! My son my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you - O Absalom, my son, my son.* David has won the war but the bitter loss of his son has emptied everything of any joy.

Doubtless beneath the surface of this man's grief there is regret and guilt and a strong sense of isolation. No one can understand the depths of his misery.

David's anguish sets before us the terrible power of death. It forbids glib remarks and overused clichés about 'understanding how someone feels'. But there is someone who understands. There is another Father who knew the horror of losing a much loved Son. There is somewhere we can go with our pain and find real sympathy and consolation.

- The Bible invites us to 'feel' as well as learn. This passage provides insights on the pain of loss. Think of someone you know who has experienced bereavement and pray for them.
- As much as the cross focusses on the suffering of the Son, it invites us to consider what it meant for God the Father. Let David lead you in that direction.

2 Samuel 19:1-23

David's grief (1-8)

David's despair over the death of Absalom blots out everything else. His soldiers victory, his position as king, his person safety is eclipsed by his grief as a father. The situation is precarious with Joab threatening his own rebellion if David doesn't pull himself together. There is real force behind his words: *You love those who hate you and hate those who love you.* (6) There are times when legitimate duty must take precedence over personal distress if difficult situations are not to become worse.

Fault lines (9-14)

The nation of Israel maybe a confederation of 12 tribes, in practice though deep divisions exist. Following the reign of King Solomon they will divide into the 10 northern tribes known as Israel leaving Judah and Benjamin in the south to form Judah. On this occasion, though it's the northern tribes, who have supported Absalom (10), who take the initiative in restoring David as king over the nation. David's response will be prompt his own tribe Judah to make the first move. This will be interpreted by Israel as a slight. See 41 - 43 for the way this will escalate and lead to a further rebellion. Repairing broken relationships needs great skill. We need that wisdom that comes from heaven. *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.* (James 3:17,18)

Individuals (15-23)

Although its Judah who welcomes the king its 2 members of the house of Saul who take centre stage. The stone throwing, curse shouting Shimei and Ziba the opportunist. Shimei pleads for his life while Ziba comes to cement his favourable position with the king. Its not an attractive picture. David grants Shimei his request. He promises on oath that he wont die. This is a promise he will keep according to the letter but not the spirit. (1 Kings 2:8,9)

The gulf with the Zeruah family (David's cousins) widens.(22) Joab's role has been given to Amasa (13) partly to keep the northern tribes happy but undoubtedly in revenge for Joab's part in Absalom's death. But like David's previous attempt to reign Joab in it will end in the death of his replacement. (20:8-10)

It is as we understand the internal and external pressures on David's life that many of the psalms come to life. He was constantly being reminded of his own frailty and inability and from that place of weakness turning to the Lord as his rock and fortress and deliverer. (see Psalm 62:3-8)

- Pray for those in positions of authority whose duties can exert a very heavy burden.
- Pray for God's wisdom for our difficult situations.
- Learn to let life's pressures and difficulties turn you in God's direction as David did. Read one of his psalms and consider the issues weighing upon his life.

2 Samuel 19 24-43

The encounters with significant people continue as David prepares to return to Jerusalem. The triumphant king stands at the heart of these chapters. It now becomes crucial to be in good relations with him. We have already observed Shimei endeavouring to reverse his earlier violent outburst. Now it is Mephibosheth's turn. Jonathan's son had been shown much kindness and yet he did not accompany David out of the capital. He explains that Ziba betrayed him (26) His unkempt appearance is that of someone in mourning and his disinterest in property vouches for his sincerity. Unlike Ziba Mephibosheth's heart is not on property but the safe return of his King. (30)

David seeks to honour Barzillai for his earlier support and practical help. (17:27-29) But there comes a point where palace favours lose their appeal. *I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is enjoyable and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of male and female singers.* (35) Barzillai defers David's offer but directs it instead towards his son Kimham. This is a debt that will go on being discharged throughout the next generation. (1 Kings 2:7).

The chapter ends with more conflict. The tribes of Israel are unhappy that Judah has stolen a march on them in the matter of escorting the king back to his throne. Although superficially it is to do with loyalty under the surface it has more to do with status and significance.

- There is always a temptation to look for security in superiority and influence. The gospel invites us to regard our union with Jesus Christ and his life and death on our behalf as all the stability we need.
- Barzillai speaks honestly about the fading pleasures of this world. Age can create frustration and regret over our circumstances or it can whet our appetite for the next world. Psalm 16 describes those *eternal pleasures at your right hand.* (Psalm 16:11)
- Mephibosheth seems little moved by Ziba's manoeuvring. He values his relationship with the King more than the property that went with it.

2 Samuel 20:1-26

The readiness with which the tribes of Israel (or at least a section of them 19:40) abandon David prepares the way for the schism which will follow Solomon's reign. The split does not come out of the blue.

This is a chapter of winners and losers. Sheba seeks to exploit Israel's disgruntlement with David. Joab remains out of favour having been replaced with Amasa as army commander. And a city is in danger of destruction largely because it happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

David's concubines find themselves reduced to the status of widows. They may enjoy royal provision but their liberty is severely restricted: They are the sexual pawns in this sad story. Cultures that reject God's order for sexual relations create many casualties.

Unlike Absalom David recognises the need for speed in dealing with Sheba and Abishai is given command when Amasa fails to deliver on time. (5) But these are complex times. It is

likely that David appointed Amasa over the army as a sop to Israel. That ploy is now shown to be ineffective. What's more having once tried to replace Joab (with Abner) and ended up attending a funeral was it any more likely to go well this time.?

Sheba's end will come as a result of a conversation between Job and a 'wise' woman. Wisdom which counsels the beheading of a man in order to save a city from destruction is ruthless wisdom. (more out of the Jonadab school of wisdom 13:3). And wisdom which rewards cold blooded murder is sowing bitter fruit. David's kingdom is a pale shadow of the righteousness God expects. Righteousness and justice as he defines these things really do matter.

- The Bible urges us to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. (Matt 6:33) These words come from the Sermon on the Mount and chap 5 defines what he regards as righteous.
- Disunity breeds trouble. Determine to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'
- Pray for those who dispense justice in our society and aim to behave even-handedly with any we are responsible for, who 'cross the line'.