

“New Beginnings” // 2 Samuel 1–5 //

*The Life of David #11*¹

Introduction

Happy New Years, everybody. All of you look great. I know that New Years is a time for New Beginnings for many of us and many of you made decisions to eat better, get in shape, spend more time reading books, whatever. Some of you made a resolution to get back into church, and you're here today, so you're batting 1000 on that one. Good job--don't break your streak.

I heard about an old atheist who was taking a walk through the woods when suddenly he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him, and when he turned to look, to his horror he saw a 7-foot grizzly snarling at him. He panicked, and ran as fast as he could--and the bear started charging at him. He got to a tree with some low-hanging branches and started to climb up. To his surprise, he saw the bear climbing the tree behind him, at which point, this old atheist cried out: "Oh God, save me!..." Suddenly, time stopped. The bear froze. All the noises in the forest grew quiet. A bright light shone upon the man and a Voice boomed from the sky: "You deny my existence for all of these years, and expect me to help you now?" The atheist looked directly into the

¹ Works Consulted: Tim Chester, *1 Samuel For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading (God's Word for You)*, The Good Book Company, September 15, 2014; John Sailhammer. *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Paul Tripp, "[David and Saul](#)," sermon was preached at Tenth Presbyterian Church on May 19, 2013; Jen Wilkin, JT English, and Kyle Worley, "[A Tale of Two Kings](#)," the Knowing Faith podcast, Episode 33, Feb 28, 2019; Jen Wilkin, JT English, and Kyle Worley, "[People Getting Shanked](#)," the Knowing Faith podcast, Episode 35, April 1, 2019.

light and said, "You're right, it is hypocritical to ask you now to treat me like a Christian, after I've lived my whole life denying that you even exist... but perhaps... could you make the BEAR a Christian?" "Very well," said the Voice. The light went out. The sounds of the forest resumed. The bear stopped, got down on his knees, bowed his head and said: "Lord, bless this food, which I am about to receive from thy bounty through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

New Years is a great time for new beginnings and I want to talk about a few of those today as we resume our study of King David. So open Bible to 2 Samuel.

The story of David's life is told in **2 seasons**--1 Samuel and 2 Samuel . We finished Season 1 last October, and like a good Netflix series we had to wait until January for the new season to drop. At long last, it's finally here, and I'm super excited about it--this is such great stuff. A new episode drops every Thursday night at our 7pm svc.

This morning, we're going to cover the first 5 chapters of 2 Samuel (which sounds like a lot, but it's not). These chapters basically serve as a review of David's life, highlighting what made David special in biblical history (this is like your season 1 recap)--and we're going to **consider 2 questions:**

1. **What made David a man after God's own heart?** (David was the greatest king in Israel's history; in 1 Samuel 13 God called him "a man after my own heart." There were lots of reasons for that; we're going to look at 3 of them today). *But here's the 2nd question...*
2. **Why is David not the King we are looking for?** These chapters contain a couple of significant hints that David is not the King

Israel has been waiting for. God had promised a king that would bring Israel identity, happiness and security--in a word, salvation. Israel first had their hearts broken with Saul, and then they thought surely David must be that King, but these chapters show you that in some really important ways, he is not.

That's our agenda for today. So, make sure your Bible is open to 2 Samuel 1. **But first, here's our season 1 recap: We left 1 Samuel on a sad note.** King Saul and his son Jonathan (David's best friend), have both died tragically in a battle with the Philistines. David, meanwhile, is still on the run; he'd been exiled from Israel by Saul who was insanely jealous of him. The prophet Samuel had anointed David as the next king, and Saul responded to that by trying to kill David even though David had done nothing but faithfully serve Saul his whole life.

As the book of 2 Samuel opens, a strange Amalekite man shows up in David's camp with disturbing news: vs. **3 David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel."** **4 And David said to him, "How did it go? Tell me." And he answered, "The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead."**

This is the first David has heard of Israel's loss and Saul and Jonathan's deaths, and he asks this Amalekite how he knows all this. The man says that as he was passing by the battlefield he heard Saul call out to him--Saul was badly wounded and he asked this Amalekite to put him out of his misery before the Philistines got to him. Now, this man is lying--we know that because the book of 1 Samuel says that Saul asked his armor bearer to kill him, and when he wouldn't do it, Saul killed himself. More likely is that this Amalekite was scavenging for

treasure among all the dead soldiers when he stumbled upon King Saul's body and sensed an opportunity for personal gain. *"Wouldn't David be excited that Saul was dead," he thought, and wouldn't he be especially grateful to this guy for finishing Saul off and bringing him the crown?* "Surely," this guy thinks, "David will be excited about this news." So he takes Saul's crown and brings it to David.

David, however, does not react like this guy expects. Instead, he says, **14 "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?"** and then commands that this guy be executed.

And here we see the first of the 3 qualities that made David a man after God's own heart:

(What Makes David a Man After God's Own Heart?)

(1) A posture of submission--David has never wanted to come to the throne by taking matters into his own hands. He'd been promised he'd be king one day--that was a privilege rightfully his. But David said, "You never achieve the purposes of God by compromising the commands of God." Countless times throughout his life David has had an opportunity to force his way onto the throne--such as the cave incidents where he could easily have taken Saul's life and assumed the throne. But David said, **"I will not break the commands of God in order to achieve the purposes of God."**

The great temptation this year is going to be to pursue some good purpose--some good thing you believe God wants you to have--in your own way. The greatest temptation is not to pursue some bad end, but a good end in your own way.

- “I feel like God wants me to be prosperous and bless my family with money but it’s not happening fast enough so I’ll cheat here and there, or overwork, to make it happen.”
- “I feel like God wants me to be married, but it’s not happening fast enough so I’ll take matters into my own hands and compromise my standards...”
- “I feel like God wants me to be happy in my current marriage, but I’m not sure that’s possible with this spouse, so I’ll leave this one and go pursue another one.”
- “I need to pass this class but I just don’t have time to put into this paper so I’ll plagiarize this final paper--it’s not that big of a deal and it will get me the grade.”

I guarantee you, you will have some moment where you are tested like this *this year*. It’s one of the biggest temptations in our lives--to take the crown up for yourself.

David’s posture is one of waiting on God, trusting in God to fulfill his purposes *in his time* and *in his way*. **It’s not that David is passive**, sitting around doing nothing, waiting on God--no, he’s very active--it’s just that his primary posture is one of **listening to God first. He doesn’t figure out what he wants to do** and ask God to bless it; he asks God what God wants to do and seeks to follow him. We see countless examples of this, like the question that opens chp 2: **“After this, David inquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?’ And the Lord said to him, ‘Go up.’ David said, ‘To which shall I go up?’ And he said, ‘To Hebron.’ 2 So David went up there...”²**

² David was anointed in Hebron. Hebron was a key location in the story of the Patriarchs and the place of their burial. God’s choice in anointing David in this location is connecting David with the Abrahamic promises. The narrative is set up to show that David will be a blessing to Israel, and to the nations. - Tim Chester

“God, where do you want to go? I want to join you.” **One of the phrases we have started using** around here at the Summit Church is that success in our ministry means joining God in what he is doing around us. Success is not attempting great things for God and asking him to bless us; success is discerning where God is at work and joining him in that.

- You see, listen to this: **A lot of us go through life backwards.** We assume that God has put us into the world to figure stuff out and fix everything, so our general attitude is; “God, this is what I think needs to be done; help me in it.”
- **But in every epoch of Scripture**, God is the primary actor. God is the one bringing salvation and blessing to the earth. Our job is to discern where he is at work and join him.
- **Jesus explained in John 5** that this was his whole ministry philosophy. He said, “My Father is always at work around me, and my job is to figure out what he is doing and join him in it.”

Write this down if you are taking notes: **A person after God’s own heart seeks to join God in what he is doing.**

You say, “But what does that mean exactly?” How do you discern where God is at work? GREAT QUESTION! It’d be great if you had one of those **little Geiger counters, like on Ghostbusters**, that showed you where God was at work, right? He’s over here!

- Sometimes it can take the form of a divine call that comes to you through an opportunity the Spirit invites you into. Think of Paul who got the vision of the man from Macedonia saying, “Come and help us.” Paul discerned that God was calling him to go over and be a part of what he was doing in Macedonia. Now, you may not get an actual vision, but God might let you sense some

opportunity where you are positioned and gifted to help, and you sense the Spirit saying, “Come and join me in what I’m doing.”

- Or maybe it’s in a conversation that you sense God has been at work in someone’s heart and he’s put you in a place to participate. That’s what Jesus did with the woman at the well in John 4. He sensed the Father had created a sense of dissatisfaction in her and put him there to point out where she could find living water. All my sharing Jesus on an airplane or in a coffee shop are like that. I ask questions, and get a sense that God is at work in someone’s life, and I join him in that.
- Sometimes you discern where he is at work by experiencing unusual success in something. As a church, we have been involved in lots of different initiatives, but we’ve never experienced the success like we have in missions and church planting--it’s like there is a divine wind blowing behind us. We’ve sent out close to 1600 of our members on church planting teams. Other pastors ask, “How do you do this? What leadership strategies?” It’s not my leadership. I know that because a lot of other good ideas I’ve tried here have failed.” This is just an area where God is at work, and we’ve sought to join him.
- Or, I was talking with a friend over the break, about my age, who was expressing some unsettledness with his small group--it was fine, there was just some unsettledness--well, in the same conversation he told me a couple of stories about this incredible success he was having, and satisfaction he was finding, in mentoring some younger couples--and so I said to him, “It seems to me like God might be calling you back up from this small group and start one filled with younger couples that you mentor.” That’s seeking to join God in what he is doing.

One of the coolest pictures of this principles occurs in David’s first battle as King, recorded in 2 Samuel 5--flip over there for a second--vs 22: **And the Philistines came up yet again and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim. 23 And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, “..When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the Lord has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.” 25 And David did as the Lord commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba to Gezer.** Isn’t that an awesome picture? “..When you hear the sound of the marching in the tops of the trees, then rouse yourself, for (then you’ll know) the Lord has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.” When you hear and see evidence of God moving out, **rouse yourself**, and join him.

One of my prayers for 2023 is that God would open up my ears to hear the sound of his marching so that I can join him. For most of my life, I’ve done the opposite. I’ve assumed it’s my responsibility to fix everything, and seek his help. No, that’s his job. My job is to join him in what he’s doing. At the end of the day, your greatest **Strategy for Success = Submission.**

Let me show you how that has changed my attitude toward parenting.

The burden of making my kids turn out right can feel overwhelming--right parents? (I’ve never felt less qualified for anything. NK--I feel like a lot of what I do is keep...)

Well, a few years ago, right before one of our staff retreats, I was reading Psalm 136 where David recounts the history of Israel; he lists out all these events in Israel’s history, and in between every event he puts in the refrain, “*The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.*” The effect you have reading it is that all of Israel’s history, both the

high points and the low points, has been woven together by the always-faithful, never-quitting, steadfast love of God.

And so I asked each of our pastoral team to write out *their own personal histories*, their high points and low points, and in between every major event put that line, “The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.” As I did that for my own life, I was overwhelmed by two realizations: **1. *A faithful God really has led me every step of the way--in the good and the bad. And #2. My biggest spiritual moments were not engineered by my parents.*** See, I had awesome parents--but not one of the big, turning point moments in my life, spiritually speaking, were engineered by them. That’s not to take away from their role in my life, but *God* wrote my story. He used my parents in the process, but HE was the one doing the writing. My life was saved not by their careful planning but his faithful intervention. **And then it hit me:** God is writing *MY* kids’ stories, too. He’ll use me in the process, but ultimately I’m just the glove; he’s the hand. I don’t carry the weight of engineering their spiritual growth--he does; I just have to join him in what HE is doing in their lives. That’s a fundamentally different approach, isn’t it? He bears the weight. When I carry it, it leads to frustration and burnout; when he carries it, I live with confidence and rest.

Hey, good news: This year, I’m not responsible to win my neighbors or friends to Christ. The Holy Spirit does that. I’m not responsible to grow this church--numerically or spiritually. He does that. He invites me to join in what *he’s* doing--which means that more important than great ideas I might have for God are ears to hear what he’s saying and eyes to see what he’s doing, so I can join him.

The first quality that makes David a man after God’s own heart is a posture of submission. Is that your attitude toward your life? Toward your dating life? Your career? Your retirement? God, open my eyes so I can join you in what you are doing...”

That’s the first principle. That was a long one. We got to pick up the pace--stop slowing me down. *Here’s the 2nd quality that made David a man after God’s own heart:*

(2) An instinct for mercy

After David hears about Saul and Jonathan’s death, he writes this incredible eulogy for him. **It starts in vs. 17 and goes for the next 10 or so verses.** It’s broken into three stanzas (vv 19, 25, and 27) each one beginning with, “*How the mighty have fallen!*” What’s most amazing to me is that there’s not one negative word about Saul in the whole thing. Instead, it’s filled with lines like this one, v 23: “**Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! ...They were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions.** 24 “**You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.** 25 “**How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!**”

- Where is the vengeance? Where is the anger? Talk about loving your enemies! Think about that: after all that Saul had done to him, David has nothing to say but praise.

As we follow David through the next 5 chapters, we’ll see that what dominates his rise to power is this instinct for mercy. He mourns the death of his political rivals and he throws feasts for them when they want to reconcile. Most of David’s men want to execute vengeance on Saul’s men who chased them through the wilderness, but David keeps

saying, “No, this will be a different kind of Kingdom, one anchored in mercy.” That brings about a peace that lasted for David’s entire life.

The greatest leaders in human history have been like this. A few years ago I read this stunning book called *The Bishop of Rwanda* about Bishop John Rucyhana, who led Rwanda in the aftermath of the unspeakable violence the Hutus inflicted on the Tutsis there. After peace was finally restored, Bishop John, who was a Tutsi himself, recognized there was a real appetite among the Tutsis for vengeance. But Bishop John led his people to see that vengeance would not only destroy the Hutus (the oppressors), it would also destroy the Tutsis, too. He explained that holding unforgiveness in your heart is like swallowing poison in hopes it will kill your enemy. The blessing of God, he said, comes to the merciful, and through his leadership peace was restored to that country.

Or we can think about this with some of our country’s greatest leaders, too. After the horrific tragedy of slavery and the bloodiness of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, in his 2nd inaugural address, famously said that we would “achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves” only by dedicating ourselves “to binding up the nation’s wounded” on both sides. Lincoln said, **“I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.”**

Or 100 years later, Martin Luther King said, **“Repaying hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe... The strong person is the person who can cut the chain of hate. Somebody must have (enough of God) in them to cut hate off and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element**

of love.”³: **“Break the chain of hate and inject love into the universe.”**

When you act in mercy, you commune with God. David was a man after God’s own heart because he acted in mercy. To the merciful, Jesus says, God shows himself merciful. And that’s what he did with David.

Who do you need to be merciful to as we start out this year?

One more thing this eulogy reveals about David’s heart:

(3) Devotion to God’s Glory

Throughout this eulogy, what David grieves is what Saul’s death meant for God’s reputation in Israel and the world. He said, vs. 19: **“Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places... 20 Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon (Philistine cities), lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.**

- **Here’s the thing: Saul’s death was personally *good* for David**--after all, it opened his path to the throne. But David doesn’t mention a single word about that.

Paul Tripp says that, “You can know all you need to know about a man’s heart by what he celebrates and what he mourns.” David mourns what this means for God’s reputation in the world; he doesn’t even mention that he will be the new king; that’s how low his own glory was on his list.

- **Let me ask you a question: How high is your glory and personal benefit on your priority list this year?** When you look forward to 2023, what are you most excited about? What are you most

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” <http://ipoet.com/ARCHIVE/BEYOND/King-Jr/Loving-Your-Enemies.html>.

worried about? Is it how prosperous 2023 might or might not make you? What good and fun relationships might come into your life? Or are you mostly focused on how you might glorify God this year? Listen: God might glorify himself by making you prosperous; but he also might give you a chance this year to bring him glory by how you suffer joyfully and patiently through pain. Or how gracious you are in relational strife. If that's what God has for you in 2023, are you ready to receive that with joy?

One of the things I've always wanted to characterize my life and ministry is that I cared more about God's Kingdom than J.D.'s.:

- It's one of the reasons we've focused on church planting and raising up leaders and giving away increasing amounts of our money to missions. Like I've told you, church planting and missions are rarely helpful for your bottom line. It's the opposite: you end up sending out some of your best people and it costs a lot of money to get them established. We've planted 508 churches. Not one time have I ever had a church planter call me up and say, "Man, we had so much money come in last year, we wanted to share some of it back with you." No, like I've said, church plants are a lot like teenagers... But if we want to glorify God, that's what we'll focus on.
- And I hope that **when the day comes that it's better for the church for me to step aside for someone new**, a rising leader, that I'll do that. (I don't think that's anytime soon, btw--I hope not. I mean, I'm only 39), but I hope that when it's time, I don't hold on for personal reasons when it would be better for you for someone else to take the reins.
- One of the things **Veronica and I do every year in January** is lay our future out on the table before God and say, "God, what do you want for our future?" Listen, we have no desire AT ALL to ever

leave, we love it here--but honestly, we're afraid of building a nice, comfortable, predictable life for ourselves here and focusing more on that than we do God's glory. (BTW, I'd encourage you to do that--Use these 21 days of prayer and fasting, which begins in a few weeks) to say, "Lord, is there anything you are calling this family to--any new ministry, any sacrifice, any change of location, even--for your glory?"

You can know all you need to know about a man's heart by what he celebrates and what he mourns.

(I say I want to be focused on God's glory above all, but, honestly, I know that's not true of me all the time, or even the majority of the time--I know that by how angry I get at God when things don't go well for me personally. I feel like, "God, what are you doing?" And I feel betrayed. "God, I kept up my end of the deal." **Or I see it in how jealous I get toward others** who are doing better than me. I'd rather them do poorly and not bring God glory than I would them take some glory away from me.) I still seem to care a lot about J.D.'s personal prosperity, so you can pray for me.

The Westminster Confession famously says that the chief purpose of man is to glorify God. That's my whole role, and yours, too. In 2023, that's what I want to most focus on and most delight in.

3 amazing things about David: a posture of submission; an instinct for mercy, and a devotion to God's glory. These are, in part, what made David a man after God's own heart. And yet. And yet. **Despite these great 3 qualities we keep seeing in David**, these 5 chapters have a rather ominous tone, because we see in these chapters some very disturbing things about David that make us ask, "How could David be the King we're waiting for?"

(Why is David not the King we are looking for?)

If you're taking notes, write down: **(1) Compromises of character**

In 2 Sam 3 (flip over), we find a list of all of his wives. By this point, he's got 6: Abigail, Ahinoam, Maacah, Haggith, Abital; and Eglah. (2 Sam 3:2-5) Multiplying wives is EXACTLY what God had commanded Kings in Israel not to do (see Deuteronomy 17⁴)--I saw Cam Newton recently say that the Bible is ok with polygamy--that's 100% untrue, read Deuteronomy.) But see, it was common in those days for kings to take multiple wives, because they could, and tragically *David went along more with society than God's word.*

And then, toward the end of chapter 3, we find a really disturbing incident involving David's first wife, Michal. Michal had King Saul's daughter, and David's first love.⁵ All indications are that they had a good marriage and she was a good wife. At one point she even risked her life to protect David. But David wasn't satisfied. He became infatuated with Abigail and wanted her, too. So while he was married to Michal, he married Abigail as a second wife.

Well, after David got exiled, King Saul took Michal and married her off to another man. Meanwhile, David marries 5 MORE wives. And now, here we are in chapter 3, several years later, and David decides he wants Michal back as wife--not because he misses her, but because he needs her for strategic reasons--marrying her would give him a political alliance with the house of Saul, and that would be helpful.

⁴ Deut 17:17

⁵ David had really gushed over her, and Samuel says that she genuinely "loved David"

14 Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." [Which is an amazing price to require for your daughter's hand in marriage. Dads, I don't think we could get away with that anymore, fwiw--but, I love the creativity in this]. 15 And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. 16 But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he (having no choice) returned.

What stands out in these verses is the utterly callous attitude David has toward Michal. He breaks up a happy home for his own convenience. In general, women are pawns for David.

And, by the way, ***this won't be the last time David takes another man's wife for his convenience.*** We've got the infamous Bathsheba incident just ahead. Listen: **The Bathsheba incident doesn't come out of nowhere;** it's the fruition of a dark pattern in David's life. David, despite being a man after God's own heart, has a besetting sin that ultimately is going to bring him down.

So, here's my question for you: What might that besetting sin be for you? Because whatever it is, the seeds of it are already there. In accountability groups I've been a part of, here's how we sometimes ask that: *If we knew that this year Satan was going to take you down (we knew that!), how would he do it?* Sexual temptation? An affair? Pornography? Cheating on your finances? A temper problem? Abuse of power? Self-pity? Bitterness? Unforgiveness? Judgmentalism? Whatever it is, beware. **The seeds of compromise are present inside you long before they harvest in destruction.** If you were to commit some heinous sin 3-4 years from now, what would you look back on

today as the seeds of that sin? You see, sin is like cancer growing inside of you; it may start out small, but left unchecked, it metastasizes until it takes over all the organs and brings the whole body down. **So: If you knew Satan was going to bring you down this year, how would it happen?** Identify the seeds of that, and address them. If not, you may have your own Bathsheba incident. It's like John Owen, the Puritan, always said, "You must be killing sin or it will be killing you."

Here's the 2nd thing--the last thing--that reveals that David might not the king we are looking for:

(2) An inability to address Israel's deepest problems.

I hope you'll take time to read these 5 chapters: they record some of the craziest stories you'll read anywhere in the Bible--stuff that would put Vikings or Yellowstone to shame, honestly. And I'm not endorsing those shows. Sit back for a minute, and let me just tell these stories to you. You ready?

Chapter 2: After David is anointed King, Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, decides to also anoint himself king. So, you have two rival kings--one in the South, David; and one in the North, Ish-bosheth. Ish-bosheth's main general is Abner, who had been the captain of Saul's army. David's main general is named Joab, and these two guys square up their armies to decide who is going to be the real king. Abner suggests that they decide it by representative warfare, where each side chooses their 12 best soldiers and they fight, and whoever wins gets the Kingdom. It's like a gladiator's duel, or something out of Black Panther by the weird waterfall.

The result? Vs. 16 says all 12 grabbed each other by the beards and stabbed each other in the stomach. Apparently, 1 or 2 of David's guys are left standing which means David's side wins, so Abner and his men take off, fleeing for their lives, and Asahel (Joab's brother) takes off in pursuit of Abner. Abner tries not to fight him but Asahel won't give up, so Abner spins around and puts his spear out, and Asahel runs right through it and dies. (Remember, again--Asahel is Joab's brother). So, Abner escapes and goes back to King Ish-bosheth, where he starts to sleep with one of Saul's old concubines. But that makes Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, mad, because not only is Abner sleeping with his stepmom, he feels like Abner might be making his own play for the throne through that. He and Abner get in a huge argument, and Abner decides he's tired of being treated like a servant and so he defects to Team David. Abner comes secretly to David to make a new alliance, and while they are in negotiations, Joab says, "Abner, there's a few private details I'd like to work out with you, so, step back here into this dark hallway with me and let's discuss." (Remember, Abner was the one who'd killed Joab's brother.) So, when Joab gets Abner back in the hallway he whips out a small dagger and stabs Abner in the gut, killing him. A lot of gut-deaths in these stories.

Meanwhile, back in the Northern Kingdom, **two of Saul's old lieutenants, Baanah and Rechab**, murder Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, who was king there, in his sleep. Then they cut off Ish-bosheth's head, box it up, and bring it to David, thinking they're going to get rewarded for crushing David's rival king. But David responds to them like he did to the Amalekite in chapter 1 by saying, "How dare you take it upon yourself to murder members of God's anointed family?" and he has both these jokers executed.

Bottom line--7.5 years after Saul's death, David is finally king over one, united Israel.

Now, I know you probably have 2 reactions to hearing all of that:

First, you're like, "that's a lot of details. Will there be a quiz?" No.

Well, maybe. But not today. **Your second reaction is, "That is some jacked up stuff. I mean, this is like "Old Testament Game of**

Thrones." Another show I don't endorse, haven't seen and that you shouldn't watch. But what all this reveals is that the Kingdom that

David inherits is deeply divided. David reigns over a mess--this is a Kingdom bathed in revenge, blood and chaos--and, while David is able to bring a chapter of peace, pretty soon the whole thing will unravel.

Israel's problems, you see, are too deep for even a righteous ruler, like David, to fix. Throughout history endless political leaders have risen to say that some government system will end injustice and bring peace. Karl Marx promised that his politics would usher in a utopia--but after 150 years, we can safely say that all Communism does is exacerbate suffering, famine and injustice. In the name of equality it creates tyranny. In many ways, our country's own founding documents implied that our freedoms and prosperity would produce a race of good men--and our government is certainly a much better system than Communism, but those freedoms have not cured greed or brought about justice for all.

I'm not saying there's no such thing as good government; I'm saying that humanity needs a different Savior, one that can heal us in places governments can't touch. And see, that leads us, readers of this story, not to despair, but hope--because, you see, one day, from the tribe and lineage of David, another King will be born, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

- Unlike David, this King will have no compromises of character.
- He won't use his power to take wives or extort privileges from others; instead, he'll use his power to lay down his life for his people, even for his enemies.
- And through his death and resurrection he will release into the world a power that can heal us at our most broken places. David is not the King we need. Jesus is.
- **As we start 2023**, have you received him? That would be the greatest thing to do in 2023.

VAMP

Let me close with one final observation: It's striking to me that David, God's anointed King, comes to the throne through a MESS. I mean, an absolute, bloody mess. **Get this: the same thing will be true of Jesus**, David's descendant, when he comes to earth one day. Jesus' advent was one filled with bloodshed and injustice. Herod had every baby under 2 murdered; Rome was oppressive. And yet, through this dark chaos, God brought his King to the throne.

Listen: the same thing is true of your life. Your life may feel like a mess—but just as God was sovereign bringing David to the throne and Jesus to the throne through chaos, he's bringing his Kingdom out of your mess, too. I'm not saying the mess isn't real or painful. It is. I'm saying the mess isn't the truest, deepest, most eternal reality--and just as God was sovereign in the mess of these chapters; he's sovereign in the mess of your life, too. Trust him, and join him in what he is doing.

There are 3 amazing qualities we see David that we should emulate this year:

- A posture of submission
- An instinct for mercy
- A devotion to God's glory

How amazing would your 2023 look if these things marked your year?

More importantly, trust the Savior who is at work in all these things. 2023 may not go exactly according to your plan. My 2022 sure didn't. But Jesus is the King on the throne, and that means all is well in Israel, and all is well with my soul.

Wouldn't that be a great way to end 2022 and start 2023? Wherever you are right now, let's stand together...and let's get in a posture of submission. Maybe close your eyes or bow your head. Maybe just take your hands and open them—signifying “God, I want what you have for me this year.” Maybe 2022 was a mess, and maybe 2023 isn't looking that much better, but as you're postured in surrender, our worship teams are going to come and lead us in that great hymn that reminds us that in submission to him it really *is* well with our souls...

Bullpen:

MLK: “There’s another reason why you should love your enemies, and that is because hate distorts the personality of the hater. We usually think of what hate does for the individual hated or the individuals hated or the groups hated. But it is even more tragic, it is even more ruinous and injurious to the individual who hates. You just begin hating somebody, and you will begin to do irrational things. You can’t see straight when you hate. You can’t walk straight when you hate. You can’t stand upright. Your vision is distorted. There is nothing more tragic than to see an individual whose heart is filled with hate. He comes to the point that he becomes a pathological case. For the person who hates, you can stand up and see a person and that person can be beautiful, and you will call them ugly. For the person who hates, the beautiful becomes ugly and the ugly becomes beautiful. For the person who hates, the good becomes bad and the bad becomes good. For the person who hates, the true becomes false and the false becomes true. That’s what hate does. You can’t see right. The symbol of objectivity is lost. Hate destroys the very structure of the personality of the hater.”⁶

Let me give you one more: Corrie Ten Boom, who spent years in a Nazi concentration camp for attempting to help Jews escape the Holocaust in Germany. In those concentration camps, she was mistreated and starved and tortured and abused. A few years after the war ended, she was speaking at a church service when afterwards an old man stepped forward and confessed that he had been one of her guards, but had after the war become a Christian. With tears in

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” <http://ipoet.com/ARCHIVE/BEYOND/King-Jr/Loving-Your-Enemies.html>.

his eyes, he extended his hand to her and said, “Will you forgive me?” Keep in mind: this was one of the guards who killed her sister; inflicted all kinds of senseless pain and tragedy on her. Let me let her tell it: “I had to take the man’s hand. I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. I told myself, ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. Jesus, I’ll lift my hand, you supply the feeling.’ And as I reached out my hand, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. ‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart.’ For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.”

David said that when he refused to take vengeance on Saul not once, but twice in the caves, when he was in an easy position to kill Saul, including once when Saul was using the bathroom, defenseless, right in front of him! David said that in countless moments when he could have taken vengeance into his own hands and made himself king. David said, “My responsibility is not to put myself on the throne; that’s God’s responsibility. My responsibility is to obey God, trust him, and wait on him to open doors for me.”

Abner is for Abner

- In dating? In marriage? Are you saying, “God, this is what I want to do, please bless me!” Or are you saying, “God, show me where you are leading. I don’t want to go ANYWHERE, with anyone, if you’re not in it.” Many of you are going to get messed up in your

dating life this year because you are going to take matters into your hands & not wait for opportunities from God.

- What's your attitude toward your career, where you live, or what you are doing with your retirement? Is it, "God, this is what I want to do, please bless me?" Or, "God, I don't want to go anywhere without you; let me join you in what you are doing"?
-
- by the power of his cross and his Spirit at work inside of us, he will be able to heal the darkest impulses in the human heart and by the power of his Sovereignty he will be able to rewrite even the darkest chapters of human history, weaving them for good. In him, we can know that all things work together for good, to them that love God and are called according to his purpose, a purpose he works out infallibly, directing all things according to the counsel of his will.