



Please turn to 2 Samuel 19 (page 252, pew Bible). If I were to ask you what song comes to mind when you think of the late Kenny Rogers, most of you would probably say, “The Gambler.” I was 11 years old when my parents got a copy of that album on a vinyl record. (Remember those?) I liked several songs on that album and still listen to a few of them every once in awhile (on Spotify, not a record player!). This past week one of the songs on that album came to mind. The title of the song is “The King of Oak Street.” The song is written from a perspective of a man who saw another man as a guy who had it all together, who was “living the good life” ... until he wasn’t. The opening lines describe his experience:

*Like a leaf caught in the wind he drifted awhile,
With no purpose or direction to his life.
He tried to get himself together and pacify his mind,
And forget about the things he left behind.*

As the song goes on, we find out that

*A careless weekend on the other side of town
Has torn the king of Oak Street’s castle down.*

Having been brought to this lowly state, the king of Oak Street repents and is eventually allowed to return home to recover what had been lost and to begin rebuilding his life.

The song ends with the observer saying,

*I’ve thought the whole thing over, and I think I understand
That the king of Oak Street was just an ordinary man.*

It’s been well said that “the best of men are men at best.” Sometimes we forget that and put people on a pedestal. We look at them and think they have it all together, when in fact they don’t. We all have our share of faults, weaknesses, and failures. It’s true of me and you, of the so-called king of Oak Street, and it was also true of David, the king of Israel.

David’s life is a portrait of success and failure, and the biblical record shows that David was far from perfect. We could say that David, like the king of Oak Street, had a “careless weekend” that “tore his castle down.” His family became terribly dysfunctional and was characterized by violence and bloodshed. Most recently David’s own son Absalom had conspired against him in an attempt to seize the throne. But in the battle that ensued, Absalom suffered a gruesome death at the hand of Joab his cousin, who was also the commander of David’s soldiers. Instead of celebrating the victory, David sorrows greatly over the death of his son.

That's the note on which chapter 18 begins, and it sets off a series of challenges that King David faces as he returns to Jerusalem to reclaim his throne. Thus the title of this sermon:

***THE (NOT-SO-STELLAR)
RETURN OF THE KING***

2 Samuel 19

The king's return is marked by *confrontation*, *conflict*, and *concessions* that must be made for the sake of expediency. This chapter provides a significant contribution to the storyline of Scripture, which shows that *no king but Christ is perfectly victorious*.

**No king but Christ
is *perfectly* victorious.**

Consider, first, the confrontation between Joab and David.

**Confrontation
(vv. 1-8a)**

¹ It was told Joab, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." ² So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, "The king is grieving for his son." ³ And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. ⁴ The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" ⁵ Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, ⁶ because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. ⁷ Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." ⁸ Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, "Behold, the king is sitting in the gate." And all the people came before the king.

- 2 Samuel 19:1-8a

Considering the loss that King David had just endured, Joab was a bit harsh in his rebuke. And his statement, "you hate those who love you," was an unfair exaggeration. But based on David's behavior, that might have been the perception of the people who came slinking back into the city because of David's agony over losing Absalom.

Joab's zeal for justice was countered by David's heart of love. Love and justice are both attributes of God, but they are never imbalanced, never in conflict, and never compromised.

Both love and justice will be demonstrated perfectly when King Jesus returns in power and glory. Scripture says, “God is just,” and he will “punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”¹ “But on that very same day when he comes, he will be exalted by his followers and celebrated by all who believe” the gospel. On that day the King will not be rebuked, he will not be confronted, for he will exercise perfect love and perfect justice in all his royal resplendence.

No king but Christ is perfectly victorious. So, “do not put your trust in princes” – or presidents! – “in human beings, who cannot save” (Psalm 146:3). Put your trust in the Lord! For he has said, “those who hope in me will not be disappointed” (Isaiah 49:23 NIV).

Conflict (vv. 8b-15, 41-43)

Going back to verse 8 and continuing on, we read:

⁸ Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, “Behold, the king is sitting in the gate.” And all the people came before the king. Now Israel had fled every man to his own home. ⁹ And all the people were arguing throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. ¹⁰ But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?” ¹¹ And King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests: “Say to the elders of Judah, ‘Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house, when the word of all Israel has come to the king? ¹² You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?’¹³ And say to Amasa, ‘Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me and more also, if you are not commander of my army from now on in place of Joab.’” ¹⁴ And he swayed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, “Return, both you and all your servants.” ¹⁵ So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan.

- 2 Samuel 19:8-15

David wasn’t trying to set up a rivalry between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes of Israel. But he knew that for his return to be a success, he had to have Judah’s support. After all, “Absalom’s revolt had erupted in the heart of Judah – in Hebron.”² Ahithophel, the counselor who betrayed David, was also from Hebron. So was Amasa, whom Absalom had set over his army. So, the people of Judah might have wondered where they stood with David. Perhaps they thought he would return with a sword instead of a scepter. So, David issues a persuasive appeal that wins their hearts and secures their allegiance.

¹ 2 Thessalonians 1:6a, 8-9 NIV.

² Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, reprinted 2018), 241.

Skipping to the end of the chapter, we read in verses 41-43:

⁴¹ Then all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, “Why have our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, and all David's men with him?” ⁴² All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, “Because the king is our close relative. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?” ⁴³ And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, “We have ten shares in the king, and in David also we have more than you. Why then did you despise us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?” But the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

- 2 Samuel 19:41-43

As you can see, the people are divided. Harsh words are exchanged. “The rightful king has returned, but there is no peace in the kingdom. The animosity and envy among his subjects threaten” its stability.³ What caused the kingdom to survive amid all the conflict? The promise God had made to David years earlier, in 2 Samuel 7: “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (v. 16 NIV).

What keeps the church, the visible representation of God's kingdom, going and growing despite the divisions and factions, the petty bickering and fussing among God's people? It's Jesus' promise, “I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not overcome it” (Matt. 16:18, paraphrased). He who started the good work in us will bring it to completion when Christ returns (Phil. 1:6). God wants us to live this day in light of that day. That's why we are to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3 NIV), to bear with one another's failings and build up one another in love, “so that with one mind and one voice [we] may glorify” God together (Rom. 15:6 NIV).

That reality wasn't fully achieved when David returned, but it will be when Jesus returns!

Concessions (vv. 16-40)

In the middle of the chapter, David encounters various individuals and ends up making some concessions for the sake of expediency.

Shimei and Ziba (vv. 16-23)

¹⁶ And Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, from Bahurim, hurried to come down with the men of Judah to meet King David.¹⁷ And with him were a thousand men from Benjamin. And Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and his twenty servants, rushed down to the Jordan before the king,¹⁸ and they crossed the ford to bring over the king's household and to do his pleasure. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan, ¹⁹ and said to the king, “Let not my lord hold me

³ Ibid., 242.

guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. Do not let the king take it to heart. ²⁰ For your servant knows that I have sinned. Therefore, behold, I have come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king.”²¹ Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, “Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord’s anointed?” ²² But David said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?” ²³ And the king said to Shimei, “You shall not die.” And the king gave him his oath.

- 2 Samuel 19:16-23

First, he encounters Shimei. Remember him – the guy who hurled curses and stones at David when he was at his lowest point, leaving Jerusalem, on the run from Absalom? Well, now that Absalom is dead and David is coming back as king, Shimei hurries to the Jordan as fast as he can to make things right with David. “He must have believed that David was a gracious and forgiving person or else he would have fled for his life in the opposite direction.”⁴ The Geneva Bible notes that in David’s adversity, Shimei was his cruelest enemy. Now in David’s prosperity, Shimei seeks by flattery to creep into his favor. As Scripture later indicates,⁵ Shimei’s request for forgiveness was simply a scheme to save his own skin and had nothing to do with a true change of heart.

But David grants the reprieve, much to the disappointment of David’s nephew Abishai, who had wanted to cut off Shimei’s head and still wants him dead. But if David executes Shimei, then the other Benjamites and northern tribes might wonder if their heads will roll too. So, probably for political purposes – and to avoid personal revenge – David shows Shimei mercy.

Shimei is quickly followed by Ziba, who rushes to get to David with his fifteen sons and twenty servants, to bring the king’s household across the Jordan and to do whatever pleases him. Ziba, remember, is the opportunist. When David was in the wilderness on the run from Absalom, Ziba brought him food and supplies. When David asked Ziba where his master Mephibosheth was (Mephibosheth was the lame grandson of Saul), Ziba lied, saying that Mephibosheth supported the conspiracy in the hopes of regaining his grandfather’s kingdom. But as David draws closer to the city of Jerusalem, he is met by Mephibosheth, who finally gets the opportunity to speak for himself.

Mephibosheth (vv. 24-30)

²⁴ Now Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson, came down from Jerusalem to meet the king. He had not cared for his feet, trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes since the day the king left Jerusalem. ²⁵ “Why didn’t you come with me, Mephibosheth?” the king asked him.

²⁶ Mephibosheth replied, “My lord the king, my servant Ziba deceived me. I told him, ‘Saddle my donkey so I can go with the king.’ For as you know I am

⁴ “Scheming Shimei,” *Living Word Bible Church* [online]. Retrieved on 22 July 2023 from <https://predikuesi.wordpress.com/scheming-shimei/>.

⁵ 1 Kings 2:36-46.

crippled. ²⁷ Ziba has slandered me by saying that I refused to come. But I know that my lord the king is like an angel of God, so do what you think is best. ²⁸ All my relatives and I could expect only death from you, my lord, but instead you have honored me by allowing me to eat at your own table! What more can I ask?"

²⁹ "You've said enough," David replied. "I've decided that you and Ziba will divide your land equally between you."

³⁰ "Give him all of it," Mephibosheth said. "I am content just to have you safely back again, my lord the king!"

- 2 Samuel 19:24-30 NLT

Mephibosheth's sincerity is evident in that what he says is backed by what David sees. Ever since David left, Mephibosheth had let himself go. His toe nails were untrimmed. His face was unshaven. His body was unwashed. "Indeed, his disheveled appearance showed that he had forced himself to share David's exile in spirit."⁶ Dale Davis writes, Mephibosheth was "lame and limited but loyal. ... Oddly enough, toneails and facial hair and dirty clothes were the sacraments of his faithfulness. He did what he could."⁷

How did David reward him? Well, earlier, when Ziba had lied about Mephibosheth, David had said that Ziba could have all the land. Now he reverses his decision, but only halfway. David should have given back all the land to Mephibosheth. It's obvious that Ziba had lied. But Ziba also had clout. A man with fifteen sons and twenty servants was someone to be reckoned with, and David needed all the support he could get upon his return. So, "pragmatism rather than justice prevailed."⁸

That won't happen when Jesus returns, because he is God and therefore he is entirely self-sufficient. He doesn't need any of us, but we all need him! King Jesus will make no concessions when he returns as King. The ends of the earth will be his possession, and he will rule with a rod of iron. For this reason the psalmist wrote, "Now then, you kings, act wisely! Be warned, you rulers of the earth! Serve the Lord with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling! Submit to God's royal son, or he will become angry, and you will perish in the midst of all your activities – for his anger flared up in an instant. But what joy for all who take refuge in him!" (Psalm 2:10-11 NLT).

Barzillai (vv. 31-40)

³¹ Now Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim, and he went on with the king to the Jordan, to escort him over the Jordan. ³² Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. ³³ And the king said to Barzillai, "Come over with me, and I will provide for you with me in Jerusalem."³⁴ But Barzillai said to the king, "How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? ³⁵ I am this day eighty years old. Can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should

⁶ Davis, 244.

⁷ Ibid., 246.

⁸ Ibid., 245.

your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?³⁶ Your servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king. Why should the king repay me with such a reward? ³⁷ Please let your servant return, that I may die in my own city near the grave of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham. Let him go over with my lord the king, and do for him whatever seems good to you.” ³⁸ And the king answered, “Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do for him whatever seems good to you, and all that you desire of me I will do for you.” ³⁹ Then all the people went over the Jordan, and the king went over. And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own home. ⁴⁰ The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. All the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel, brought the king on his way.

- 2 Samuel 19:31-40

Barzillai is loyal and benevolent, but he's old and weary. He's losing his hearing, so he can't appreciate good music or anything else that is pleasant. He can't taste his food. He doesn't want to be a burden to the king, so he sends Chimham, who may have been Barzillai's son, instead. Barzillai will walk with the king only partway, then go back to his own home where he'll die and be buried near his parents.

Even after Barzillai's death, he was not forgotten by David. Near the end of the king's life, when he was giving instructions to his son Solomon, David said, “Be kind to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead. Make them permanent guests at your table, for they took care of me when I fled from your brother Absalom” (1 Kings 2:7). David was forced to make another concession in the case of Barzillai. Because Barzillai was old and close to death, he did not go back with David – who also was old and would eventually die. So he had to make a concession. The best he could do was have Solomon show kindness to Barzillai's sons.

But that will not be the case with the followers of Christ when King Jesus returns. For he has conquered death for all who trust in him. When he returns, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And the bodies of those who are still alive when Jesus returns will be transformed into bodies that will never die – so that in the coming ages God will continue to “shower [his] grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7 MSG).

So, when King Jesus returns, the Scripture will be fulfilled that says, “Death is swallowed up in victory.... Thanks be to God who gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Cor. 15:54b, 57 NLT). We will feast at the King's table, and with our senses fully intact like never before, we will enjoy the splendors of heaven forever.

**No king but Christ
is *perfectly* victorious.**

So, put your trust in Christ alone and thank God for the victory that is ours in him.