

Sermon Title: “What Now?”

Series: Seeking God’s Kingdom, Part 30

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2

Main Takeaway: Even when we can't see what lies ahead, our times are in the LORD's hands. Trust that His providence is already preparing the way forward.

Sermon Manuscript — Part 30

Last week we finished 1 Samuel...

Today we move into 2 Samuel.

But don't think of this as like we're starting something completely new.

In fact...

Originally it was just called “Samuel” — It was one book.

But when it was translated into Greek, it was too long...

It didn't fit on a scroll...

So they divided it.

Jewish Bibles today still have it as just one book...

But our Bibles reflect the Greek tradition.

So think of it like this:

Last week we finished Season 1 of Samuel...

This week we're starting Season 2.

Season 1 focused on Samuel as Israel's prophet,
and Saul's reign as their king.

Season 2 focuses on David's reign.

Now, like all good shows...

Season 1 ended with a cliffhanger.

Samuel's gone.

Saul's dead.

Jonathan's dead.
 Israel's defeated.
 David's still in Philistine territory...
 His town is destroyed.

And the question hanging over the whole story is:
What now?

So, when David and his people came back to their home in Ziklag,
 None of them knew that the Philistines defeated Israel's army.
 They wouldn't know that for a couple more days.

But while they're picking up the pieces and deciding what to do...
 The Philistines went back out to the battlefield to scavenge materials.

They found Saul's body on Mount Gilboa.
 So they cut off his head and stripped his armor.
 And we saw last week that they displayed these in their temples.

But did you notice what they did with Saul and his son's bodies?
 I only gave it a brief mention because it's kind of gruesome...
 But they nailed their bodies to the wall in Beth Shan.

[SLIDE 1] Beth Shan [Map]

Why Beth Shan?

You can see it was in the Jezreel Valley near the Jordan River.
 This was a major trade route...
 Think of this as like an ancient route 30...
 It was well traveled.
 And Beth Shan was like a perfect rest stop.

So their bodies hanging on the wall was a message.
 It was a constant reminder of the Philistine victory...
 And it was a warning to anyone that would resist them.

But that didn't last long.

Look at the last few verses of 1 Samuel 31...

[SLIDE 2] 1 Samuel 31:11-13 [Image]

11 When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. 13 Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

You might remember the people of Jabesh Gilead.

Way back when Saul was made Israel's king,
His first challenge was to save the people of Jabesh from Nahash,
the Ammonite king.

Saul gained his first victory there at Jabesh,
And he even gave the LORD credit for the victory.

Now, decades later...

The people of Jabesh remember that day...

And when they heard about what the Philistines did to Saul...

They decided to do something risky.

They gathered some of their bravest men,
And they traveled under the cover of night,
They snuck into Beth Shan and took Saul and his sons down from the wall.
Then they brought the bodies back to the town of Jabesh.

So this is kind of a full circle moment...

**The men of Jabesh were willing to risk their lives to honor the king
who once risked his life for them.**

And you know... It's interesting...

They would've known about Saul's failures.

They would've heard about how he killed the priests at Nob.

They would've heard about how he wanted to kill David.

Yet, instead of dwelling on all his mistakes...

[SLIDE 3] They chose to remember a moment of Saul's faithfulness. [Image]

And you know...
I think we can relate.

When someone passes away...
We don't gather together to talk about all their mistakes and failures...
Instead, we remember the moments that mattered most...
Moments of their lives that shaped us.

That's exactly what the people of Jabesh were doing.

They were honoring Saul and his sons by purifying their bodies in the fire...
Then giving them a proper burial under a nearby tree.

And that's where 1 Samuel ends.
But 2 Samuel immediately continues the story.

As they honored Saul...
The camera pans out...
News of his death began to make its way south...
Until eventually it made its way to David.

[SLIDE 4] Amalekite man comes to David [Image]

2 Samuel 1 tells us that a few days after David rescued his people...
A man from Saul's army came...
His clothes were torn...
He was dusty and dirty...

And when he saw David...
He fell to the ground to honor him.

The man claimed to have escaped from the Israelite and Philistine battle.
David asked what happened...
And the man said...

[SLIDE 5] 2 Samuel 1:4 - "The men fled from the battle," he replied. "Many of them fell and died. And Saul and his son Jonathan are dead."

David asked how he knew they were dead...
The man said...

[SLIDE 6] 2 Samuel 1:6-10 [Image]

6 “I happened to be on Mount Gilboa,” the young man said, “and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and their drivers in hot pursuit. 7 When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, ‘What can I do?’

8 “He asked me, ‘Who are you?’
“‘An Amalekite,’ I answered.

9 “Then he said to me, ‘Stand here by me and kill me! I’m in the throes of death, but I’m still alive.’

10 “So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord.”

So that’s his story.

Do you believe him?

His details are slightly different from the previous chapter.

So that leads some scholars to think maybe this guy isn’t being 100% truthful.

Either way...

There’s one detail that really stands out to me.

The Amalekite said he found Saul leaning on his spear.

Whether that’s true or not...

The narrator chose to include this detail.

That means...

[SLIDE 7] [Image] We’re supposed to picture Saul's final posture... as him leaning on his spear.

That’s important...

We’ve seen his spear throughout the book of Samuel.

He always had it by his side...

He held it while sitting on his throne...

He took it into battle...

He threw it at David — twice...
 He also threw it at his son Jonathan...

And now, at the end of his life...

He's pictured as leaning on the very thing he trusted most.

His final posture reminds us of what fear can do to our hearts.

And so after hearing the news...
 Watch how David responded to the news...

[SLIDE 8] 2 Samuel 1:11-12 - Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

I wonder what the Amalekite expected?

My guess is he was thinking David would be celebrating.

I can say that I highly doubt he expected what came next.

David had him killed.

Not because he was angry...

David put him to death because the man's own words convicted him.

He killed the LORD's anointed...

No one has the authority to end the king's reign other than God.

Even Saul's armor-bearer wouldn't do it when Saul asked...

I guess he knew better.

But here, the Amalekite takes the credit...

And pays the ultimate price.

Then David wrote a lament for Saul and Jonathan...

[SLIDE 9] David's Lament [Chart]

I'm not going to walk through every line of the poem...

But if you step back and look at the big picture...

David's lament isn't just an emotional outburst.

It's actually carefully crafted.

And was written so that all the people of Judah could learn it.

And so in his lament...

David honors Saul and Jonathan...

He grieves what Israel has lost...

And in doing all of that...

We begin to see his heart.

So how does he honor Saul and Jonathan?

First, Saul is honored as Israel's anointed king.

That's what verse 21 is doing in a poetic way:

"the shield of Saul, no longer rubbed with oil..."

Meaning, the LORD's anointed king has died.

Then, when you step back and look at the whole lament...

David remembers both Saul and Jonathan as courageous men.

Five different times he calls them "the mighty."

But even more than that...

Saul was like a father to David...

And Jonathan was like a brother.

David clearly respected and loved these guys.

Which is kind of surprising isn't it?

You'd think after all the trouble Saul gave David...

You'd think David would be relieved Saul is finally out of the picture.

But instead...

David takes time to grieve.

And that's actually really important.

It's worth a little self reflection...

Do we take the necessary time to grieve?

Are we trying to "press on" too quickly?

Or are we letting perseverance finish its work?

Part of learning how to persevere is slowing down...

And allowing ourselves to grieve.

One of the hardest things I've learned...

Is **the value of giving myself intentional time of grieving.**

It's a time where we lean into the pain...

And bring it all to the LORD in prayer.

Because we can't handle it all on our own strength.

Think about what was weighing on David...

He wasn't grieving just one thing...

He was grieving many things at the same time...

Saul was gone.

Jonathan was gone.

Israel was defeated.

His enemies were celebrating...

It's as if his grief was pressing in on all sides.

And so he says in verse 20...

"Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon..."

In other words...

Don't celebrate this moment like the Philistines are celebrating right now.

This was a **devastating moment** in Israel's history.

It was the end of an era...
And the beginning of another.

You know it strikes me that 1 Samuel opened with a grieving mother...
And 2 Samuel opens with a grieving future king...

And like the people of Jabesh...
David chose to honor Saul by remembering the moments that mattered most.

He didn't dwell on Saul's past mistakes...
He didn't rally his people and lead them into battle...
He simply took the time to mourn.

And that's an important lesson.

**Trusting the LORD doesn't mean skipping over the many layers of grief.
We don't have to pretend that loss doesn't hurt.**

But...

[SLIDE 10] How's someone experiencing loss like David supposed to move forward?

I think the answer has to do with **trusting God's providence.**

Have you ever played the "what if" game?

What if I did this instead of this?

What if I hadn't said that?

What if I noticed the signs earlier?

I'm sure we've all wrestled with our "what if" questions.

My guess is that David did...

[SLIDE 11] The LORD's Providence in Motion Chart

Think about everything we've watched David go through.

He was forced to leave the battlefield,
Only then to find his home destroyed.

He strengthens himself in the LORD,
And rescues his people.

Meanwhile...
While all that's happening...
Saul and Jonathan die.
Israel's army loses.

And when David finds out...
He mourns.

And so I wonder if David asked himself questions like...

[SLIDE 12] What if...?

*What if I insisted on staying at the battlefield...
Maybe things would've turned out differently?*

*Then again...
What if I didn't come back home?
Maybe I wouldn't have rescued my people in time?*

You know...

When you stop and think about it...

Everything seems to hang on these little moments.

If just one thing had gone a little differently...
The whole story might look different.

Those "what if" questions...
They tend to plague our minds...
They can keep us up at night...

But here's the thing...
The reason we ask ourselves "*what if*"...
Is because we don't see the whole picture.

We replay the past because we can't see the whole picture.

And yet...
What are we seeing with David's story?

Through all the uncertainties...

God was already at work.

That's God's providence.

[SLIDE 13] God's providence means He's at work even when we can't see what lies ahead.

In this season of grieving...

David couldn't see what was ahead.

But God could.

David couldn't see the road to the throne...

But God was already preparing the way.

That's true for us too.

Even when we can't see what God's doing...

God hasn't stopped working.

Even in our grief...

His providence is always in motion.

You know...

The Scripture says that David and everyone with him, mourned and wept and fasted until evening came.

The day began with tragedy...

And it ended in tragedy.

Then it sort of leaves us there.

It's begging the question...

What now, God?

It makes me think of David's Psalms...

[SLIDE 14] Psalm 31:9 - Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief...

That sounds like the moment David's in now.

He's had many moments like this.

But the thing is...

He finds his strength in the LORD.

That's why he can say...

[SLIDE 15] Psalm 31:14-15 - But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands.

Think about those words...

"My times are in Your hands."

David was in distress.

Earlier in the Psalm he was pleading with the LORD to rescue him.

He says his life is consumed by anguish...

And his years by groaning...

His strength is failing...

But notice where David's focus is.

He doesn't spend this psalm trying to explain everything that's happened.

He simply brings his distress to the LORD.

He just says:

"My times are in Your hands."

Every season...

Every chapter...

Every moment...

Every unanswered question...

"My times are in Your hands."

That's what it looks like to trust God's providence.

David didn't know what chapter 2 would bring.

But he knew whose hands held his life.

And maybe that's where some of us are today.

We don't know why yesterday unfolded the way it did...

And we don't know what tomorrow holds...

But like David...

Our times are in the LORD's hands.

That's not a promise that everything will work out the way we want it.

It's not saying that if we just have enough faith,
We wouldn't ask God the "What now?" and "What if?" questions.

God wants us to bring our questions and our laments to Him.

But no matter what happens...

Trusting the LORD's providence means that we stand on His promises...
Because nothing can hinder the LORD's purposes.

David was learning this truth.

And years later...

He could write these words...

[SLIDE 16] Psalm 27:13-14 - I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

I can almost hear him say...

*When all is stripped away...
Wait for the LORD.*

*When life takes an unexpected turn...
Trust that our times are in His hands.*

*When you don't know what comes next...
Keep seeking the kingdom of God.*

*Because **nothing** can hinder the LORD's purposes.*

May that be the posture of our hearts...
As we look to Jesus.

Let's Pray