

Sermon Title: Before Moving Forward

Series: Seeking God's Kingdom, Part 32

Scripture: 2 Samuel 2:8-32

Main Takeaway: Stop. Wait. Listen. Receive Strength. Move forward.

Last week we were encouraged to wait on the LORD.

We saw how David took the time to grieve...

And when he was ready...

He went to the LORD and asked for the next step.

This week we'll see a pretty stark contrast...

I'm sure you could tell as Karen read today's scripture...

It had a lot of fast moving parts.

One guy's running so fast he gets speared because he couldn't stop himself!

And that's what I want to talk about before we dig into today's passage.

Think about all the moving parts in our lives right now.

Things happening at home...

Getting the kids from one place to another...

Getting dinner on the table...

The never ending list of chores...

Scheduling appointments...

Planning vacations...

Maybe you've got a lot going on at work...

Deadlines are coming up...

Meetings are filling your schedule...

Your phone is blowing up with people asking questions...

Think about all that and ask yourself...

[SLIDE 1] When was the last time I stopped?

I realize we're all busy...

But when we're constantly running on adrenaline...
We become overly reactive...
Anger rises more quickly...
Patience grows thinner...

But when we hit the pause button...
Even for a moment...
Our heart rate slows...
And we're able to think more clearly before we react.

But hold on a second...

When it comes to hitting the pause button...
I'm not talking about sitting and scrolling on our phones...
Or spending hours watching TV.

I'm not saying these things are bad...
I'm just saying that they can easily distract us from seeking the Lord.

And that's the biggest thing I want to talk about today...

[SLIDE 2] Intentionally stopping what we're doing creates the space we need to seek Jesus before we take our next step.

We've seen over the past couple weeks that this is exactly what David did.

David took the time he needed to grieve...

Then (chapter 2 verse 1)...

"In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD."

He stopped...

He asked...

He listened...

Then he acted.

That's 2 Samuel 2, verses 1-7.

But our passage today has a very different feel.

Because, instead of slowing down and going to the LORD...
 Did you notice that after verse 7...
 The narrator doesn't mention *anyone* going to the LORD?

Instead, the passage we heard this morning,
 was like a boulder rushing down a hill.

When Karen read chapter 2...
 We saw that armies gathered...
 One reaction led to another...
 Chaos erupted...
 Violence escalated...

And that momentum continued to build...
 Until someone finally spoke up.

So I want to take a closer look at the action...

But before we do...

Let's introduce ourselves to the people in this passage...

[SLIDE 3] Character Chart

In Judah (southern part of Israel):

We've got **David**...
 He's now the king of Judah for the next 7.5 years.

[Zeru-yah] Zeruiah is also important (v13).
 She's David's sister...
 She's also a mother of three...
 One of which is **Joab**, the commander of David's army.
 We'll see Joab throughout the rest of 2 Samuel.

Then over in Israel...

We've got **Abner**.
 We've seen him many times.
 He's been Saul's commander since 1 Samuel 14.
 He survived the battle with the Philistines,
 And after about five years...

He made Saul's last surviving son, **Ish-Bosheth**, king over Israel.

The two people that we'll focus on today are Joab and Abner.

They're the ones that battled in 2 Samuel 2.

Look at verses 12-13...

[SLIDE 4] Pic of Joab & Abner's men at Gibeon

2 Samuel 2:12-13 - Abner son of Ner, together with the men of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. Joab son of Zeruiah and David's men went out and met them at **the pool of Gibeon**. One group sat down on one side of the pool and one group on the other side.

Okay so I looked for a good picture of Gibeon... couldn't find one.
So this is my attempt to reconstruct the scene.

The 'pool' of Gibeon was a huge cistern that collected water for the town.
This is basically what it looked like...
But honestly the real version isn't as perfect looking.

I just wanted you to picture the scene.

It starts out calm.

The armies gather.

They sit.

Then the two commanders start talking.

At some point Abner says to Joab...

"Let's have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand..."

In the ancient world,
sometimes a smaller group of fighters would determine the outcome of the battle-
(David & Goliath, 2 Samuel 17)

So each side picked 12 men — 24 total.

And it didn't go well.

All 24 men died.

And I'm sure you can imagine the situation escalated quickly...
 Each side stood up and attacked each other...
 And Joab's men quickly gained the upper hand...

Here's what happened next...

[SLIDE 5] 2 Samuel 2:18-19 - The three sons of [Zeru-yah] Zeruiah [David's sister] were there: Joab, Abishai and [Asah-el] Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him.

[SLIDE 6] 2 Samuel 2:20-21 - Abner looked behind him and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?" "It is," he answered. Then Abner said to him, "Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the young men and strip him of his weapons." But Asahel would not stop chasing him.

So here we've got one of David's nephews... Asahel...
 A young man known for his speed...
 He's chasing down Abner, Israel's commander.

Abner tries to get Asahel to stop chasing him,
 But Asahel wouldn't let up.

[SLIDE 7] 2 Samuel 2:22 - Again Abner warned Asahel, "Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?"

Notice Abner warned Asahel twice.

The first time it was, "Don't chase me... Go after someone else."
 And now, "Stop chasing me! I don't want to kill you."

It's interesting...

Abner doesn't seem scared.

He's a highly skilled and experienced warrior.

And so his warning has weight.

But he also respects Joab as David's commander.

He knows that killing Joab's brother would change things dramatically.

There's no sitting down together again after something like that!

But...

[SLIDE 8] 2 Samuel 2:23 - Asahel refused to give up the pursuit...

At this point you have to wonder...

Does Asahel really stand a chance?

He's got speed and youth on his side.

But unfortunately for him...

He was running so fast that he couldn't stop when he needed to...

[SLIDE 9] ...so Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot. And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died.

I assume Asahel was running faster than everyone else on his side...

So when they finally caught up to him...

They stopped.

They're stunned that Asahel died.

So his brothers, Joab and Abishai,
and the rest of the men continued after Abner.

And as the sun was setting...
They caught up to Abner.

But Abner and his men were positioned on a hill...
They had the high ground.

And here's the voice that stopped the action...

[SLIDE 10] 2 Samuel 2:26 - Abner called out to Joab, “Must the sword devour forever? Don’t you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their fellow Israelites?”

This struck me.

Going into this chapter...

I’m thinking Joab is the good guy...

Abner is the bad guy...

But life is always more complicated than that.

Abner was Saul’s commander.

He served under Saul for years.

He witnessed Saul’s violence first hand.

He was with Saul in many battles.

He was there when Saul tried to kill his own son.

He was there when Saul relentlessly pursued David.

He was there when Israel’s army failed to defeat the Philistines.

And now, he’s the one saying...

Must the sword devour forever?

I wonder if you’re sensing Abner is tired of the fighting...?

Especially fighting against his own people.

That’s why he says fighting each other will only end in **bitterness**.

[SLIDE 11] (don’t read) 2 Samuel 2:26 - Abner called out to Joab, “Must the sword devour forever? Don’t you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their fellow Israelites?”

In fact...

That word...

“**bitterness**”...

It's the same kind of bitterness that Hannah felt when she prayed to the LORD...
It's a **deep anguish**... (1 Samuel 1:10)

It's the kind of anguish people felt from Saul's reign... (1 Samuel 22:2)

Saul was the kind of king that took whatever he wanted from his people...
They desperately needed relief from how he treated them...
And so that's why many of them chose to join David in the wilderness.

And now Abner...
Saul's longtime commander...
Is **tired**.

He's already seen this kind of violence lead to deep anguish...
And he's ready for it to stop.

We see this in a few ways...

- Before the battle started...
He sat down with Joab to talk.
- He then suggested that only a handful of men fight.
- And when things got out of control...
He honestly didn't want to kill Asahel...
He warned Asahel to stop a couple times...
- And now he's calling Joab to stop...

Abner is tired of the violence.

He's seen how this kind of violence left his people in ruins.

And so he says to Joab...

"Must the sword devour forever?"

I don't know about you...

But I didn't expect that from him.

It reminds me of Abigail.

Remember when David was consumed with anger...

And Abigail's voice of wisdom stopped him in his tracks?

Once again...

The voice of wisdom comes from the person we'd least expect.

Whether Abner realized it or not...

His words reflect the wisdom of God.

And that's what interrupted the cycle of violence.

Because finally...

Someone listened.

Joab stopped...

And both armies went home that night.

Still...

Asahel was dead.

Hundreds of soldiers lost their lives that day.

Families would be grieving their loss.

So the hard reality is that the bitterness Abner warned about...

Already started.

Their actions that day had severe consequences.

Which brings us back to the question we started with this morning...

[SLIDE 12] When was the last time we stopped?

Throughout this chapter, people kept reacting.

They pursued...
 They retaliated...
 They refused to stop.

Actually it's interesting...
 The act of "stopping" is mentioned 5x in our passage today.

Yet no one chose to stop until Abner finally said...

"Must the sword devour forever?"

So I think chapter 2 is inviting us to reflect on our own momentum.

Are we just charging ahead in life?

And **what would it look like for us to slow down so we can stop in time?**

You know...

In Psalm 23...
 David learned that sometimes God *makes* His sheep lie down.

[SLIDE 13] Psalm 23:2 — "He *makes me* lie down in green pastures."

The Hebrew there is intentional:
God sometimes caused David to stop.

As the Shepherd...
 God picks the spot...
 And we lie down.

Why?

Because **we aren't always the best at knowing when to pump the brakes.**

Clearly there are times when the LORD wants us to slow down and stop.

So what if we adopted that pattern?

**What if we saw stopping,
 as an act of trusting the LORD with whatever's ahead?**

This is why God's Word calls us to...

[SLIDE 14] Psalm 46:10 - "Be still, and know that I am God"

Psalm 46 is a battlefield Psalm.

It says that...

The LORD makes wars cease...

He breaks the bow

shatters the spear...

and burns the shields...

And yet...

In the midst of the chaos...

The LORD says:

"Be still, and know that I am God."

When we're on the battlefield,

It's tempting to just react...

Fight-or-flight mode kicks in...

But the LORD says:

Be still.

*Remember **who I am**.*

And I love that Psalm 46 reminds us of *who* the LORD is.

It says:

"God is our refuge and strength,

An ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear...

The LORD Almighty is with us;

The God of Jacob is our fortress."

And so the writer is teaching us...

That even when we're on the battlefield...

[SLIDE 15] We can be still because of who God is.

You know...

We're in a spiritual battle every day.

Paul said that our fight is against the spiritual forces of evil. (Ephesians 6:12)

That's not metaphor...

That's reality.

You and I are up against an enemy that we cannot defeat on our own.

Our swords and spears don't solve the real problems in this world.

But Jesus is the Game Changer.

I love His words in Revelation 1:8 where He said:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega..."

The one who is, and who was, and who is to come...

The Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

Jesus is our King of kings and LORD of lords. (Revelation 19:16)

So...

Who or what do we have to fear?

No matter what we're going through...

No matter the battles raging around us...

We can be still because of who God is.

And the blessing in the storm is that when we stop...

That creates room to wait on the LORD...

Waiting creates room for listening...

And listening creates room for the strength to move forward...

This is why Isaiah said...

[SLIDE 16] Isaiah 40:28-29 - Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will

not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

[SLIDE 17] Isaiah 40:30-31 - Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah's saying that when we place our "hope" in the LORD...

We're patiently waiting on Him...

We're expecting that He will act...

And when He does...

We're trusting His guidance.

And did you notice the promise in Isaiah's words?

Those who hope in the LORD, find what?

Strength.

That's what happened to David not long ago.

When David came home at the end of 1 Samuel...

And found his town destroyed and his people taken...

He was greatly distressed.

His men even started turning against him.

But rather than let fear take control...

David stopped.

He just stopped.

And the Scripture says that he strengthened himself in the LORD.

(1 Samuel 30:6)

He put his hope in the LORD...

And his strength was renewed.

There's a pattern in there for us...

[SLIDE 18] The biblical pattern for seeking God's Kingdom is...

Stop...

Wait...

Listen...

Receive strength...

And move forward.

That's wisdom.

And honestly...

I don't do this perfectly.

I'm still learning...

And I'm finding that the hardest part is hitting the pause button.

You'd think it'd be the easy part...

But sometimes when we're living life at 100mph...

We miss the Holy Spirit's prompting to slow down and stop.

And the truth is...

The LORD is always speaking.

His presence is always with us...

Ready to guide and strengthen us.

But are we willing to stop...

Wait...

And listen...

Before we move forward?

The song we're about to close with reflects on words from Psalm 121:

I lift my eyes to the mountains — where does my help come from?

My help comes from the LORD.

When we lift our eyes up to the LORD...

That's the moment we stop.

And so may the LORD show all of us today where we need to slow down...

Stop...

And just...

Be still.

Because we know who God is.

We know Jesus is our refuge and strength.

And because He's always with us...

We don't have to live in fear.

Let's Pray

We pray as Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into testing, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.