Sermon Title: When Everything Changes
Series: Seeking God's Kingdom, Part 48
Scripture: 2 Samuel 15 & Psalm 3
Main Takeaway: Our worth and security aren't determined by what others think or by our circumstances. They're grounded in who Jesus is.

There's an old quote I heard earlier this week…
It comes from Niccolo Machiavelli…
He said:

[SLIDE 1] "Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are."[1]

That's pretty much the definition of social media.

Everyone sees what you appear to be…
On Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube…
But *few experience what you really are.*

So that makes me wonder…
How much of our feelings of self worth…
Come from what others think?

I've heard it said that in business…
The most valuable asset you have is your reputation.

Because what people think about you…
Can directly impact your success.
That can be true in business, in politics, you name it…

Our reputation matters…
But it's never worth compromising our relationship with the LORD.

That's unfortunately what we'll we see in today's passage.

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[1] Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Prince*, (1532) Chapter 18. Translation, George Bull (1961)

David's son, Absalom, has been back in Jerusalem for a couple years…
He's the one who murdered his own brother…
And as far as we know…
He got away with it.

At first, David didn't want to see him…
But after some time, Absalom was granted an audience…
He bowed before the king…
David kissed him…
And that was the end of the chapter.

We weren't really sure if that meant their relationship was restored or not?

Either way, some time has passed…
And in the next scene…
It's clear that Absalom's still fed up with his dad.

So he launches a plan to take the throne from David…
But first he has to build up his reputation…
And win the hearts of the Israelite people

To do that…
He needed to start *looking* and *acting* like a king.

In fact…
Look at the previous chapter…
I skipped this last week because I wanted to bring it out today…

[SLIDE 2] 2 Samuel 14:25 - In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him.

It's kind of a funny detail…
Like… *Who cares what he looks like?*

But maybe the narrator's trying to tell us something?
Remember when the LORD rejected Saul as the king?

Samuel had Jesse's sons line up in front of him…
And he thought he knew which one the LORD would choose…
But the LORD said…

[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 16:7 - "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

People were impressed by the height of king Saul…
Samuel was impressed by the appearance of Jesse's oldest son…
Even David was described as being handsome…

But appearance doesn't tell us what's in the heart.

It's like what Machiavelli said:
"Everyone sees what you appear to be…
Few experience what you really are."

So I have to wonder…
Since we know Absalom's planning to take his dad's throne…
I wonder if the narrator included Absalom's appearance on purpose?

[SLIDE 4] 2 Samuel 14:25 - In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom…

Maybe the narrator wants us to think about,
What the LORD *really* looks for in a king?

Because according to human standards…
Absalom looks the part…
But the question is…
What's *in* his heart?

Look at 2 Samuel 15:1…

[SLIDE 5] 2 Samuel 15:1 - In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him.

This is what kings in the ancient world did.
When they traveled, they'd have their men go in front of them…
Their chariot would follow behind.

So Absalom's starting to look the part…

But if he's going to take the throne from his dad…
He'd need the people of Israel on his side.

So **he came up with a plan…**

[SLIDE 6] Absalom by the city gate (2 Samuel 15:2-6 picture)

He'd wake up early and stand by the city gate…
Travelers would come from all over Israel to bring their lawsuits to David…
Because part of the king's job was to judge the cases of his people.

But before they could get to him…
Absalom would stop them at the city gate.

But why stand at the entrance to the city?
Why not in front of the palace…
Or out along the road?

Well, in the ancient world…
The city gate was where people usually gathered to settle legal matters.[2]

But the people passing by Absalom…
Were specifically coming to present their case to king David.

But before they got to David…
Absalom would call out to them…

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[2] Example: Ruth 4

The travelers would bow before him…
And he'd kiss them as David did to him…
Then he'd listen to why they were going to David…

And he'd say:
"You've got a good case…
It's too bad there's nobody available to hear it."

That's clearly a jab at David…
And it's probably not true.

I actually wonder if the travelers turned around and went home?
Like… Imagine someone coming a long way to Jerusalem…
Maybe it took them days to get there…

They meet the king's son at the city gate…
He takes the time to hear them…
And even affirms they have a good case…
But then says there's no representative of the king to hear them.

They had no reason to doubt him…
So I wonder if they went home…
And on their way back, maybe they're thinking…
Why wouldn't David appoint his son as the judge?
At least he seems to be the kind of man who gets things done!

I don't know if that's what happened…
Regardless…

[SLIDE 7] 2 Samuel 15:4 - Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice."

[SLIDE 8] 2 Samuel 15:6 - Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.

You know…
I do wonder…
Did David know what Absalom was up to?

I mean, this wasn't a one time thing at the gate…
Absalom did this *regularly*.

So how could David ***not*** know?
He's the king!
He probably had eyes and ears everywhere…
Especially in his own city.

But if David knew what Absalom was doing…
Why didn't he do anything about it?

I don't know?

What we do know is that this went on for a while…
And eventually, when Absalom was ready…
He went to David and asked if he could go to Hebron.

Apparently Absalom made a vow years ago…
He said that if the LORD ever brought him back to Jerusalem…
He would go and worship the LORD in Hebron.

I don't know why he made that vow…
Or even if it's true.
But the thing that strikes me the most…
Is that Absalom used the LORD's Name as part of his plan!

He's coming before king David…
As if he's innocently following the LORD…
But in reality…
We know he's scheming to take David's throne.

This whole scene is dripping with deception.
It's evil.

But again, how much did David know?
We don't know.
All we know is that he allowed Absalom to leave Jerusalem in peace.

But while in Hebron…
Instead of worshiping the LORD…
His real purpose in going there was to gain a larger following.

Look at verse 10…

[SLIDE 9] 2 Samuel 15:9b-10 - So he went to Hebron. Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'"

Hebron is where David was declared the king of Israel years ago.

But now…
When the trumpets sounded…

[SLIDE 10] 2 Samuel 15:13 - A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom."

This was more than popular opinion.
"The hearts of the people" being "with Absalom" means…
Israel's backing Absalom now.

Their allegiance has shifted from David, to Absalom.

Not *everyone* abandoned David…
But it was enough that…

[SLIDE 11] 2 Samuel 15:14 - David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword."

And so David and his entire household prepared to leave…
Only ten women were left behind to take care of the palace.

When David's household got to the edge of the city…
Everyone with him began marching past him…
And by the way…
We're talking about *hundreds* of people leaving with David.

There was one person in the crowd that caught David's attention…
His name was Ittai the Gittite.

He was a foreigner…
An immigrant to Israel.
He literally just arrived in Jerusalem the day before all this went down.

So David's like:
Why should you leave on my account?
He encouraged Ittai to stay rather than wander around in the wilderness…

[SLIDE 12] 2 Samuel 15:21 - But Ittai replied to the king, "As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be."

Ittai recognized David as the true king.

And so, he marched on with David.

And **as David crossed the Kidron Valley…**

[SLIDE 13] (David and his people ascending Mt of Olives pic)

He climbs up the Mount of Olives…

Barefoot…

His head was covered…

And as he continued moving forward…

He and the whole countryside…

Wept.

Talk about a major life transition.

Everything he knew, changed in an instant…
And… he had no idea if the LORD would ever bring him back.

And so…
I wonder what David was thinking on that walk?
Maybe he was second guessing himself?

Maybe he was thinking:
If only I didn't let Absalom come back…
If only I punished him as I should have…
If only I stopped him from talking to people at the city gate…

Or… Maybe he was thinking…
This is all my fault.
If only I hadn't taken what I wanted that night on the rooftop…
Maybe my son wouldn't be taking the kingdom from me now?

We don't know all the thoughts David had…
But we do have Psalm 3.

Psalm 3 is David's prayer that's about the time he fled from Absalom…
It gives us a window into his heart in that moment.

[SLIDE 14] Psalm 3:1-2 - LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."

These are the people Absalom turned against David…
And they're convinced the LORD won't save him from Absalom.

But despite the opinion of many…
David prays…

[SLIDE 15] Psalm 3:3 - But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory *[kavod]*, the One who lifts my head high.

The LORD not only gives him protection and strength…
But it's interesting…
David says the LORD is "my glory".

The Hebrew word for glory is *kavod…*
Kavod carries the ideas of weight, importance, honor, or glory.

In this context…
David's saying:
The LORD is my honor [kavod].

In other words:
His worth isn't determined by what others think…
It's grounded in who the LORD is.

Think about it like this…

David is losing his throne…
His status…
He's losing the loyalty of the Israelite people…
And he's forced to leave his own city.

In the ancient world…
All of these things are what brought a king his honor.

But David says:
You, LORD, are my honor.
You are my glory.

His words convey a deep trust in the LORD…
Especially during one of the hardest moments in his life.

David's words also show us that…
His circumstances haven't changed *who* the LORD is.

That's such an important thing for us to remember…
Especially when we're going through hard times…

Our circumstances don't change who the LORD is.

No matter what happens…
The LORD is always faithful to His promises.

And so…

[SLIDE 16] 2 Samuel 15:30 - David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.

David's walking up the same hill where, centuries later, Jesus prayed:
Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me…[3]

And as David walked up the hill…
His head was covered.
Head coverings often symbolized deep mourning and distress.

And yet, I love that even though his head was covered…
David prays: *The LORD is the One who lifts my head high.*

There's a real sense of hope…
Even confidence…
In his words.

Not a confidence that everything will work out.
But a confidence that the LORD is with him…
Strengthening him every step of the way.

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[3] Matthew 26:39

I love that David doesn't have to wait until everything works out…
Before he can express confidence in the LORD.

I don't know about you, but I find that comforting.
Our confidence in the LORD doesn't have to change…
Just because our circumstances changed.

Again, the reality is…
The LORD never changes.

And because of that…
David can pray…

[SLIDE 17] Psalm 3:5-6 - I lie down and sleep; I wake again, <u>because</u> the LORD sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

I'm sure a lot of us have had those nights where we lay awake in bed…
Our thoughts racing…
Worried about our 'what if' questions…
Replaying in our minds moments that could've gone differently.

But even in those moments…
The LORD sustains us.

We lie down…
We wake again.

The LORD gives us the strength to keep moving…
And the confidence that no matter what happens…
We don't have to give in to fear.

That's not to say our fear comes from a lack of faith.

[SLIDE 18] "Faith over fear" doesn't mean we don't fear. It means we trust the LORD is near even in our fear.

I'm sure you've all seen the signs and the social media posts:
Faith over fear!

From what I've seen…
Sometimes that means:
Stop being afraid!
As if our fear comes from a lack of faith.

But that's not consistent with what we're seeing in Scripture.

David's running because he's afraid his son would kill him…
He's worried about what Absalom will do to his people…
He's weeping because of what's happening to the kingdom…
And he has no idea how any of this will play out…

But none of that is a lack of faith on his part.

He still trusts that the LORD is his shield…
He trusts that the LORD is his source of honor…
And he trusts that the LORD is the One who lifts his head…
Even in the darkest valleys.

Sometimes we go through really difficult things.
We *will* fear.
We *will* worry.

But…

[SLIDE 19] Our fear doesn't have to control our lives, or even define who we are, because our worth is grounded in who Jesus is.

Jesus is the LORD.
He's our Deliverer.
He's our Salvation.

He's the reason we can face each new day with hope…

And confidently declare:
"This is the day that the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it."[4]

Not that I won't face fears or worries…
But I will trust in the One who is King of all my moments…
Jesus.

So will we trust Him?

Even when things don't go the way we want them to?

Will we trust Him to be our Deliverer?

Because we may not know what tomorrow holds…
But we know Jesus is our true King.

He didn't promise to fix every situation we face in this life…
But He does hear us…
He does walk alongside us…

He is our shield…
Our honor…
And the One who lifts our head high.

And so…
When reflecting on today's sermon…
I was thinking…

Our deepest security isn't found in managing what people think about us…
Or even controlling our circumstances…
Our security is found in knowing Jesus.

And when we put our faith in Jesus…
Our believing loyalty…

[4] Psalm 118:24 (ESV)

He not only saves us from our sins…
But we can lie down and wake again…
Because He sustains those who seek His Kingdom.

And so…
In that confidence…
I'll end with these words…

[SLIDE 20] Jude 24-25 - To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy —to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Let's Pray