

Helpless Before the LORD

2Samuel 12:15b-25

Over the last few years I have taken up sailing as a hobby.

That may seem like a strange hobby for someone who gets sea sick, but there is something about being on the water being carried along by the wind that I really enjoy.

The basics of sailing are fairly straight forward.

If you imagine the direction of the wind to be like a clock with twelve o'clock being directly into the wind the boat will move forward along as it is pointing in a direction outside of ten and two o'clock.

Once you know how to set the sails for all the directions relative to the wind you can get to any destination that you want to go.

More often than not you can't get from A to B in a straight line, but you can get there.

The more you learn and the more options your boat has, the more efficient you get at going from place to place.

One lesson that I have learned time and again with sailing is that while it is possible to harness the wind to move your boat from place to place it is impossible to control the wind.

When I was very new to sailing I went out in wind that was too much for my skill level and while the boat did not capsize it felt like it came pretty close and that was not a fantastic feeling.

In case anyone is wondering, yes I where a life jacket.

Sailing in heavier wind can be fun because you are going faster, but you really have to pay close attention.

On the other hand, when the wind stops so does your boat.

On a few occasions, we have been very close to our destination and everything goes calm and as much as I want to get to where I want to go I can't make it there.

There are only two choices, wait for the wind to pick up or give up and put in the motor.

I think about that when I read about people crossing the ocean in past centuries on large wooden sailboats.

Crossing the Atlantic on those boats could take anywhere from 5-8 weeks.

Can you imagine being out in the middle of the Ocean with little to no wind going nowhere for days at a time?

Far worse, can you imagine being on one of those ships in a tropical storm with waves as high as sixty feet?

The word that comes to my mind when I think about a situation like that is the word 'helpless'.

Have you ever felt like that before? Have you ever felt like you are in a situation and you have no power to change it?

[That, I think, is how King David must have felt in the passage of Scripture that we are looking at this morning **2Samuel 12:15b-25**. The prophet Nathan had come to confront him about the evil that he had done and inform him of what would happen as a result. One of the consequences would be the death of his newborn son. The second half of verse fifteen tells us that the ‘LORD afflicted the child...and he became sick.’ I can think of few things that can make a person feel as powerless as a severely ill child. David has no ability to change the situation and that is something most of us come face to face with at some point in life. Often times these types of things are a real fork in the road for people in terms of their relationship with the LORD. People can turn to God or away from Him. Israel’s king here shows us some of what it looks like to turn to the LORD. What he does when his son first falls ill teaches us that...]

Point #1 – Helplessness shows us our need of God. (Verses 15b-17)

It is very easy to live under the illusion (perhaps it is better said delusion) that we can live without the LORD, but...

Verses 15b-16 set the scene for us.

The writer once again reminds us of David’s moral failing by referring to Bathsheba as “Uriah’s wife”.

As I mentioned last week, the text does not give a detailed explanation of God’s decision to afflict the baby boy, but we do know that if David had not despised the Law of the Lord then this would not be happening.

David, like all of us, is powerless to rewind the clock and undo what has been done.

He has nowhere to turn, there is no doctor, no medicine, he could spend all of his wealth, search the entire world, and he could find nothing to help him.

He is totally helpless.

What does he do with that realization? It says here that ‘he sought God on behalf of the child’.

That might make some of us wonder why he would do that.

God could not have been clearer about the child dying, so why does David bother to pray?

How often we are fatalistic in our thinking? How often do people say, “If God has decided everything what difference does it make if I pray?”

David doesn’t feel that way even though he has heard directly from the LORD on this.

Instead of hardening his heart toward the LORD he earnestly pleads before the King of Kings.

There is nowhere else to turn.

We are told three things about David's pleading. We are told that he fasts, he goes in, and he lays on the ground.

Where he goes is left unsaid, but it is likely his house, his courtyard, or perhaps a room that he had set aside for prayer.

Where ever he is, we are told he is laying on the ground which is a sign of humility and worship.

He is also going with food which was common practice in times of mourning, lament, and pleading with God.

That, I believe is very significant. To go without food is to deny yourself something that you need to survive.

All creatures are dependent on things outside of themselves to live.

When we eat, breathe, sleep, or feel the warmth of the sun we are being taught that we are dependent creatures.

What then does it say when we intentionally deny ourselves something we need to survive in an act of worship?

It is saying to God that we get the reason why He created us to need stuff.

It is a way of saying we need the LORD more than everything else life depends on.

In verse 17 we are told that 'the elders of his house' (likely meaning his chief and most faithful servants) try to get him up off the ground to eat something, but he refuses.

Their concern is probably well intentioned, but David in desperation knows that he needs to stay with His face pressed into the ground before God.

[I'll never forget the first time I went to the hospital to see someone who was sick beyond what medical care could do anything about. I've had that experience many times over the years. It is a feeling of absolute helplessness. It reminds me of how small and powerless I am in the world. It reminds me that if there is to be any hope or any help it needs to come from God.]

We live in a time and place where people are conditioned to believe otherwise.

The abundance of wealth, property, and technology has turned the hearts of many to the delusion that we don't need the LORD.

That delusion is stripped away when we are confronted with our weakness, when we are faced with a situation that we cannot change.

Those moments are moments of incredible grace.

They are opportunities to have the veil of self-deception lifted from our eyes so that we may fall on our faces before the living God because He is the only One Who can make a difference.

[There is no doubt David can see his need of the LORD here, but that doesn't mean things are going to go the way he wants. When an unbeliever doesn't get their way in a helpless situation it often hardens their heart. But for a believer something else is possible. We can see that here with David. Having taken the posture of lament, fasting and interceding for his sick boy the illness ends in death. From my perspective it would have been far easier on David if he had died instead of his son, but that is not what happens. Instead we see him go again to the LORD in a different way which shows us this life giving truth, that...]

Point #2 – Grieving believers find rest in God's sovereignty. (Verses 18-20)

Trusting the LORD when He says no to our pleading before His throne is the only way to find genuine peace in a world broken by sin.

Verses 18-19 tell us about the outcome of the child's illness (Verses 18-19).

It seems best to understand the phrase "On the seventh day the child died" to mean the seventh day of his illness.

Seven is often used in the Scriptures as a way of showing fullness or completion.

That is likely significant in two ways here. One the sickness has come to fulfillment in the death of the boy and two David's lament or time of pleading his case before the LORD has also come to an end.

For seven days he has been upon the ground, likely dressed in sackcloth, going without food, and weeping over the boy.

His display of grief must have been both visibly sincere and dramatic because his servants who were unable to get him off the ground in verse 17 are now afraid how he is going to take the news.

If this is how he was when the boy was sick who knows what he might do with the news of his death.

It becomes obvious to David what the servants are talking about and so he asks for and receives confirmation of what he had already guessed to be true.

The LORD had refused to grant the king's request and as He had spoken through the prophet Nathan He put an end to the life of the child.

Having been racked with grief this is what he does in **Verse 20**.

Far from the reaction the servants were expecting, the king shifts away from lament.

He washed which would have been necessary from having laid on the floor for seven days and if he had taken up the common form of lament mixed with repentance he would have put ashes upon himself as well.

He anoints himself likely with scented olive oil and put on a change of clothes.

As we will see in verse 21 his behaviour here is a bit unexpected.

The expected thing would be for him to continue and likely even increase his expressions of sorrow and grief, but instead he gets cleaned up.

Why? It is right there in the middle of verse 20, he gets cleaned up to go “into the house of the LORD” to worship.

Instead of shaking his fist at God in anger, he submits himself to God’s rule.

He accepts that as the Maker of heaven and earth God has the right to give life and take it away as He sees fit.

God is still most worthy of worship even when His decisions cause us grief.

David clearly shows that he is resting in God choice by breaking his fast.

It is a way of saying that he accepts the LORD’s answer.

[We find this kind a trust in the LORD in a number of places in the Bible. One of the most well-known examples is that of Job. Remember what he says when he loses everything including all his children? He tears his robe and shaves his head in lament. He falls on the ground and says, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed by the name of the LORD.”]

These are not men who suffer loss and say, “Who cares it’s all good!”

These are men who feel grief to the deepest parts of their being and yet entrust themselves to the rule of God over everything that happens.

Listen, there is no other way to find rest in this life.

Does being angry and bitter towards God bring peace into a person’s life?

Does chalking things up to a random purposeless existence bring any kind of comfort?

There is no rest there, but there is under the Sovereign hand of God Who says, “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.”

[The LORD is not a genie in a bottle or a heavenly butler whose highest concern is to do things the way we would like them to be done. He is the King of the universe Who is governing all things for the display of His glory which serves the highest good of His people. That is true whether we believe it or not and because it is true we can find real rest there. David finds more than rest here. While he accepts the death of the child in the present he also looks to the future here and in so doing show us that...]

Point #3 – God’s people find real hope in God’s power. (Verses 21-23)

Pain and loss will not persist for those belonging to Jesus because He has overcome sin and death.

What David does strikes his servants as strange.

These guys are likely the same men referred to as ‘the elders of his house’ in verse 17.

Some commentators think they are David’s chief advisors who are used to giving him counsel which likely best explains why they feel free to say what they say to the king.

What they say sounds like a rebuke (**Verse 21**).

How David acts here is not the typical order of operations.

One might feel grief and anxiety over the severe illness of a close family member and then if or when the person passes away the expression of lament usually increases.

That is why they were concerned earlier.

They were thinking man if he has been this bad while the boy has been sick, how much worse is it going to be when the child has died?

The opposite happens instead.

He is beside himself during the illness and he seems to recover at the news of his death.

David what’s up with that?

He tells them and us in **Verses 22-23**.

If David’s psalms are any indication then we know he has good theology.

He holds in tension here the eternal, all knowing, all powerful, unchanging nature of God with the truth that the LORD hears the prayers of His people.

We see multiple times in the Bible God decree death and then relent on account of the prayers of His people.

That is not God changing His mind. That is God acting in a way to prompt His people to pray so that He can demonstrate His compassion and gracious towards those who seek Him.

David knows his bible well enough to have worked that out so he prays.

On this occasion, however, the LORD does not relent and the child dies.

Is that the end of the story? If it were then what David does here wouldn’t make any sense.

If this were the end of the story then David should continue in fasting and tears.

Yes it is true that the child has died, David's efforts of pleading before the LORD did not change the outcome.

David himself has no power to change the situation.

When he asks, "Can I bring him back again?" the answer is obviously no.

He is powerless, but this is not the end of the story.

When he says, "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" he is talking about his own death.

That statement strongly implies being reunited with his boy in a meaningful way when his life is over.

Just listen to what David says in Psalm 16:9-11.

David knows that death does not have the final say over the people of God.

He believes in the power of God to raise people from the dead and so he believes he will see his son again.

That is real hope in the face of death.

That is the hope of everyone who knows Jesus as their saviour.

It is as clear as can be from this passage that sin brings death and that is why Jesus died.

He died to pay the penalty of all the sin of everyone who believes on His Name.

How do we know that worked? Because Jesus didn't stay in the grave.

God exercised His power to raise Him to life and so it will be for all who believe including King David.

[David's change from fasting, weeping, and praying to washing, worshiping, and taking food is not a change from sorrow to indifference as some might take it to be. It is an accepting of God's decision in the hope that His power will conquer sin and death. What can David do to fix what has been done? Nothing, but the situation is far from hopeless. We see that in his looking forward to going to his son in due time and we see it in the next two verses as well.

Immediately following the death of the boy conceived in adultery we read about the birth of another boy. From what is said of this boy here and what we know of him from other parts of the bible it is clear we are supposed to see something more than David had another son. We are supposed to see the amazing truth that...]

Point #4 – God's faithfulness triumphs over failure. (Verses 24-25)

The glorious plan of redemption that has been in the mind of the LORD from all eternity past will prevail because it depends on Him and therefore He will overcome every act of rebellion.

The first few words of verse 24 mark an important change, they say, “Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba.”

Only one other time in chapters 11-12 is Bathsheba referred to as David’s wife and that is at the end of chapter 11 and it is said right after Uriah’s funeral with the sense that she doesn’t belong to him.

Every other time Bathsheba is mentioned she is called Uriah’s wife, but here in verse 24 she is referred to as David’s wife in what seems to be a positive sense.

It is really important to stress here that the change in reference is in no way intended to minimize the evil that has been done.

God never does that and neither should we. Whenever this incident is mentioned in the Bible it is always condemned.

[I’ve have heard more than one person reference their sin as a good thing because they see their life and having turned out pretty good as a result. They talk about it like God is happy they broke His laws because of how great things turned out. Thinking like that is absolutely evil. No matter how gracious God is at sparing us from the foolishness of our sin we should never ever think of evil as good!]

That said, human failings do not put an end to God’s promises.

Bathsheba is now David’s wife. That egg is not going to be unscrambled.

To cast her out at this point would only make things worse.

Now look at what the LORD does despite David’s sin (**Verses 24-25**).

If we read this as one baby replacing another we will have missed the point entirely.

This is about God keeping His covenant promise to David and as a mercy to this woman who has suffered tremendous grief on account of the sin of God’s chosen king He brings the son who would next sit on the throne of Israel through her.

His name is Solomon which means “peace”.

That I believe is a testimony to the fact that David once again is at peace with the LORD and it is also a peak into the future because Solomon’s rule will largely be a time of incredible peace and prosperity.

As is common in the Bible, Solomon gets more than one name.

His second name is given to Him directly from the LORD, through the prophet Nathan.

The last time God sent Nathan to David is was to confront his sin and proclaim God’s judgment which included the death of his baby boy.

Now Nathan is sent to declare God’s love for the newborn and to give him the name Jedidiah which means “beloved of the LORD.”

I think it is quite impossible to put into words the magnitude of David’s failure, but even though he had fallen is such a huge way God’s plan has not failed.

His covenant faithfulness will continue through Solomon and through the generations until the long awaited son of David Who will also be the Son of God would come into the world to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth forever.

No matter how badly people have mess up, God's plans go forward.

[If you doubt that just look at the lives of the disciples. Peter failed, he repented and God restored him. Matthew a tax collector called by Jesus to preach the gospel. Paul hated Jesus and hurt lots of people, Jesus met him and the Holy Spirit changed him to be a powerful missionary and the most significant contributor to the writing of the New Testament.]

He is just as faithful today.

We should never celebrate our failings, nor should we ever be indifferent towards them, but we also should never despair because of them because in Christ God overcomes them all!

In order for that take place in our lives we have to realize what David realizes in these verses.

We have to realize that we are helpless before the LORD.

If we can see that then we'll be able to see how much we need God.

If we can see that then we can learn to rest in His sovereignty.

If we can see that we can find hope in His power.

And if we can see that we can rejoice in His faithfulness.

Oh how good it is to realize that we are helpless before the LORD and find His mercy, compassion, and love which come through faith in the LORD Jesus.

May His Name be praised forever and ever, Amen.