

Keeping God First in Our Affections

2 Samuel 19:1-15

Listen with me to the words of **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**.

King David, no doubt, would have heard these words many times as a young boy.

It is fairly certain that he would have recited these words many times and would have committed them to memory.

One of the things that can happen to us when we become very familiar with something or when we recite something many times is that we can become so used to it that we can say the words and have them mean very little to us in our hearts and minds.

When I consider the history of the people of Israel recorded for us in the Bible, I have to wonder how many people recited those words with their lips but had little or no desire for them.

It is an easy thing to have religion become a series of shallow rituals rather than a life defining faith.

For David though these were more than words recited and then forgotten.

When the prophet Samuel was speaking about bringing a new king to the throne of Israel in 1Samuel he said in 1Samuel 13:14, “...*the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people...*”

A short time later God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons the next king.

When Samuel arrives and meets Jesse’s oldest son Eliab he thinks to himself, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.” (1Samuel 16:6)

No sooner did the thought cross his mind then God said to him, “*Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*” (1 Sam. 16:7 ESV)

All of David’s older brothers passed in front of Samuel and the LORD says no to all of them.

It is not until they retrieve David from keeping the sheep that the LORD says, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.”

This young man will be king because his heart is for the LORD.

For David reciting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 was more than just words coming out of his mouth, for him it was the expression of his heart’s desire.

[Was he perfect? Not by a long shot, but by God’s grace he did have a desire to love the LORD with his whole heart. That is something that is important for every single one of God’s people.

Deuteronomy 6 is more than a suggestion it is a command. In fact Jesus calls it the greatest command in the whole bible. Are we perfect? Not at all, like David we are people in need of God's grace to give us a desire to have the LORD first in our affections. One of the ways that God shows us how we are doing in that regard is by bringing us through times of trial. That is where we meet King David in our text this morning **2Samuel 19:1-15**. We meet him in a moment of sorrow and this moment has some things to teach us about putting God first in our hearts. The first lesson is something that can often be overlooked and even hidden by some, but it is critical for us to see. David's sorrow in these first four verses shows us that...

Point #1 – Keeping God first can be very hard. (Verses 1-4)

It is easy to say we love the LORD above all things when the cost is low, but when the cost is high it is another matter.

Verse 1 tells us about David's emotional state.

It is hard to say exactly how long David had been like this, but it would have been at least a few hours from the time the first messengers delivered news of the battle and the time Joab arrives back at the city with the army.

David had been in this state of 'weeping and mourning' that entire time.

It is an understandable reaction to the news that Absalom has died.

The fact that David had already endured the loss of more than one son likely added to his grief.

It is not hard to imagine David holding his head in his hands and saying, "Not again, not again."

Despite the fact that Absalom was a murderer and a traitor and was trying to kill his dad, he was still David's son and it is clear that the king had a tender heart towards a child who did not deserve it.

I think a lot of parents can relate to that.

When many people think back to that first time they held their son or daughter in their arms they remember being overcome by this great sense of unconditional love.

Even children that break your heart into a thousand pieces are still your children right?

David is clearly feeling that about his rebellious son who has come under the judgement of the LORD through the hand of Joab.

I don't believe the king's sorrow here in and of itself is wrong, but the degree to which he allows it to consume him here shows a struggle with ordering the affections of his heart.

That seems clear in the way his mourning affects the soldiers returning from battle. **(Verses 2-4)**

In order to see the full weight of these verses we have to consider the bigger picture of what had taken place on the battle field.

This about more than two groups of human beings fighting it out, this is about God's sovereign will being worked out in the history of the world.

When the messengers come with news of the battle they say, "The LORD has delivered you."

It was God who determined the outcome of the battle and in so doing remained faithful to the king of His choosing.

The LORD answers the question of whether or not His plans and purposes in redeeming His people will stand and the answer is a resounding yes.

The means by which He does that in this case is by taking the life of Absalom which is what the prince's actions deserved.

To be sorrowful over the loss of a son is completely understandable, but the degree to which David carries on here diminishes or we might even say despises the saving work of the LORD.

Instead of rejoicing in the victory of the LORD, the men come into the city ashamed as though the LORD has failed and they lost the battle.

David is doing the same here. His crying out "with a loud voice, 'O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!'" is saying something for everyone to hear.

He is saying that the victory of the LORD is seemingly nothing in his sight because his son, who was fighting against God's plans and purposes, is no more.

In this moment of grief David seems to care more about Absalom than he does about the LORD and that is wrong.

Loving God above everything else means loving Him more than your children.

You know what that is hard.

[There is an account from the early church of the martyrdom of a young woman named Perpetua. While she was in prison awaiting her execution her father came to her multiple times trying to convince her to offer the incense and say Caesar is Lord instead of Jesus. One of the ways he tried to convince her was by getting her to think about her newborn son. Deny the LORD for the sake of your baby boy. It is a heart wrenching plea, but she chose to love Jesus first.]

This is what Jesus means when he says in Matthew 10:37, "*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*"

That can be incredibly hard to live out.

When a child lives in rebellion against God it can be very tempting to set the Scriptures aside and change what we believe in order to placate them or comfort ourselves.

What we need to understand is that if we give into that temptation whether it be with a child or anyone else, we are not only failing to love God as we should but we are failing to love people as well.

It is not loving to encourage people to be satisfied in themselves and their own desires.

It is not loving to give people the impression that they are worth more than the infinitely glorious and eternal God of the universe.

[What benefits the people around us the most, whether they realize it or not, is to “love the LORD is all our heart, all our soul, and all our might.” That can be very hard at times which raises a question. What happens when we fail? As we have already said we are not perfect, far from it. Praise the LORD for the grace that He shows His people in the person and work of Christ in whom we find forgiveness for all our failures. Praise God that He not only forgives our failures but He shows them to us and calls us to something better. We can see that happen for David in the next part of this passage. We see here that...]

Point #2 – Keeping God first sometimes requires confrontation. (Verses 5-8a)

When our priorities get out of whack, the LORD in His kindness will show us our need of correction.

Having been informed of David's display of grief and having witnessed the effect it is having upon the people, Joab goes into the house to speak to the king.

There is some irony in Joab coming to speak to David because he is the one who took the life of Absalom when he could have spared him.

Let's listen to the first part of what he has to say to the king (**Verses 5b-6**).

He first points the king to what his display has done to his servants.

When they should be rejoicing in God's saving work, they are feeling humiliated and ashamed.

He then reminds David about what was on the line, his life and the lives of the rest of his immediate family.

We know Absalom was for sure ready to take David's life, and he very well may have taken the lives of the rest to prevent any kind of future rebellion.

Joab's point is how can you make these guys feel ashamed when they have done so much for you today?

And why are you willing to shame these guys? He says, “Because you love those who hate you and hate those you love you.”

Ouch! That is a stinging rebuke, but he does have a point.

It does seem like David cares more about the life of Absalom than he does about the lives of his commanders and servants.

He moves from rebuke to threat in **verse 7**.

This is no idle threat.

As commander of the army Joab would have an enormous amount of influence over his soldiers.

While I doubt every man would abandon the king as he is claiming here it is easy to imagine a whole bunch of them siding with Joab and then it is out of the frying pan and into the fire for David.

Now look at the result of this confrontation in **verse 8a** (stop at subtitle).

The king does what he should have done when the army returned to the city victorious.

He pulls himself together takes his seat at the gate and honours the victory that the LORD gave to him that day.

The king is forced through this confrontation to see his fault and he chooses to change his behaviour which is at least an outward acknowledgement that his affections needed to be reordered.

Joab is not a godly man and the threat he makes against the king is sinful, but God uses him to confront David because he needed it.

[I remember one time back when I was still working in construction I was on a call with my boss trying to get a situation resolved. There was a really rough around the edges guy standing next to me during the call and when I hung up he lit right into me. He said that on the call I was making myself look good and everyone else look bad. That had not been my conscious intention while on the call but after listening to him I realized he was right. I had to say, “You are absolutely right, I’m sorry would you forgive me.” That was a super humbling moment for me to be rebuked by an unbeliever but I was thankful that the LORD used him to give me a course correction.]

We need that sometimes don’t we?

Why do we get off course? Is it not because God gets knocked down in the affections of our hearts?

Often times we have a hard time seeing that.

Often times we have a hard time caring about that.

Thankfully, God in His grace confronts that in our hearts.

He does that in various ways and through various people.

Sometimes that happens even through unbelievers.

[Those moments are gracious opportunities for us to acknowledge that we have loved created things too much and to turn from that and seek to put the LORD first. We should ask ourselves, “How do we handle being confronted about things in our lives?” Do we stop up our ears, dismiss, or ignore things like that? Or do we carefully consider and evaluate such things with a desire to love God more? Let’s face it, sometimes we need to be straightened out. Praise the

LORD He does that, He acts to make Himself our highest treasure. He does that because as we see in the next part of this passage...]

Point #3 – Keeping God first is for our highest good. (Verses 8b-15)

The one that treasures the LORD above all things will never be disappointed because He will redeem and restore His people from every evil.

Having been confronted and having pulled himself together to encourage his men in regards to what the LORD had accomplished through them, we see the first steps taken to restore David to the throne. (Verses 8b-10).

What is said here reminds me of when the Israelites first asked the prophet Samuel for a king.

They wanted a king to go out and fight their battles and defend them from their enemies.

They remember here that is exactly what David had done for them so many times in the past.

They are thinking the whole Absalom experiment is a failure and they need somebody.

Who better than David? Let's bring him back.

I think there is a subtle but important contrast here.

Notice they call Absalom the one they 'anointed', but they refer to David as "the king" at the end of verse 10.

One is a king chosen by men but 'the king' is the one chosen by God.

The people here are coming around to God's plan.

With the other tribes of Israel wanting to restore the king, David turns his attention to his own tribe in verses 11-14.

Why the tribe of Judah seems a bit slow to welcome David back to the throne is left unsaid, but with David's attention back on being King according to God's plan he reaches out to them.

He does not want to have to march on Jerusalem with the army, but rather wants there to be a willing restoration of their relationship.

That likely explains the particular message he has for Amasa in verse 13.

By this time David has probably learned that Joab took Absalom's life and he likely sees Joab as having too much power in the kingdom so it makes sense that the king would want to replace him as commander of the army.

Amasa is an interesting choice because he was the one Absalom has chosen to be over the army.

It seems strange to give someone who had betrayed the king such a high rank.

It is a risk for sure, but according to chapter seventeen we know that Amasa was Joab's cousin which also makes him David's nephew.

David must have known him well enough to be reasonably sure this would help the situation more than hurt.

Who better to persuade the people who were part of the rebellion than one of their leaders?

His calculation pays off because in verse 14 it says that he (likely referring Amasa) sways the hearts of 'all the men of Judah' back to David and they invite him to return.

That brings us to **verse 15**.

If you are familiar with Israel's history recorded for us in the Bible then you know that the Jordan River holds a tremendous amount of significance.

One of the more stand out moments involving the river is when the people cross over with Joshua to take possession of the Promised Land after having wandered in the wilderness for forty years on account of their disobedience.

At the first place they make camp the LORD tells Joshua to make some flint knives and circumcise all the men of Israel because all of those who were born in the wilderness did not receive the sign of the covenant.

Having crossed the Jordan they had finally come to the freedom of the Promised Land from their slavery in Egypt.

When they crossed the Jordan they were circumcised and there "the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal." (Joshua 5:9)

The word Gilgal means to "remove" or "roll away."

I don't think it is coincidence that they come to the same place to bring David back across the Jordan to once again sit on the throne.

The shame and reproach that David had to endure as he fled for his life from his son is being removed and the way is clear for him to return to Jerusalem.

This is a picture of the LORD rescuing and restoring David.

That is what happens for those to cling to the LORD for salvation, they are saved.

No one and nothing else in all creation can do that for us in a lasting sense.

Think about all the things that take God's place in our affections.

Can any of them truly satisfy our hearts? Can any of them truly give us life?

Only the Lord can do that and when He is our highest treasure we are most able to enjoy His salvation.

If David had continued to put his love for Absalom higher than the LORD it would have ended badly, but because God graciously gave him some much needed perspective he was able to return to the throne.

Listen God rescues those who trust in Christ from a much greater enemy than Absalom and He is bringing us to a much more glorious place than an earthly throne.

In the person and work of Jesus, God is saving us from sin and death and He is bringing us into an eternal kingdom.

Do you know what the greatest gift God will give us in that kingdom is?

It is not streets of gold, mansions, crowns, perfect health, great food, and shiny white clothes.

Those things are good but we will see and enjoy them all in the light of God's greatest gift which is Himself.

When God commands us to keep Him first in our affections He is doing that out of love, He is doing that because it is for our highest good.

On this side of eternity that is hard at times.

It is hard to choose Christ over mother, father, sister, brother, son, and daughter.

It is hard to choose the LORD over people and things that are right in front of our face.

Because it is hard there is no doubt we will struggle and fail at times.

Thank the LORD He is gracious and kind and He will confront us when that happens and continue to bring us to Himself.

Thank the LORD He does that because in so doing He is seeking our highest good.

That is why this is the greatest command in the bible, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*"

May that be our deepest desire for our highest good to the praise of His glory forever!