

DAVID AND FAITH IN THE CRUCIBLE OF CRISIS

2 SAMUEL 15

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The most painful crisis that I have had in my life is getting fired from a church. I served initially as an assistant pastor for six years. Then I became a preaching pastor in the Midwest for a short time. The church was a newer congregation, and I replaced the founding pastor.

Most of the people were young in age. There was a somewhat older couple who controlled most of the levers of power. The husband was head of the church board and taught the adult Sunday school class. The wife was Sunday School superintendent, church pianist, music director, and women's Bible study leader. The two of them were obviously capable, but they had a habit of making fun of each other in public, which I thought was a terrible example for the younger couples. The wife also had a tendency to criticize people in public. The women especially complained to me about that. I would tell them that the right thing to do was to talk to her. I suspect that most of them were afraid to do so.

In my second year there, I saw this woman criticize two people in front of others in one week. So I spoke to her in private and talked in what I thought was a gentle way about how people had been hurt by this kind of public criticism on her part. She didn't say much, but after that she set out to get rid of me. I was the problem. There were secret meetings and plottings behind the scene. One morning after the church service I was handed a letter which requested my resignation. I was devastated. We had a new baby. We had recently bought a small house. We were out with one month's salary.

We have had a lot of health challenges in our congregation. Many of them have been tough. Some of them resulted in death. But there is a unique pain that comes from crises that are human-induced, that come from personal rejection. Some of us have had to deal with the emotional response that comes from receiving divorce papers, from learning that our parents are separating, from getting a pink slip at work, from dealing with a rebellious child, or from being attacked by someone whom we thought was a friend. King David experienced this kind of crisis in the passage before us this morning. We are going to look at it to see what it has to teach us about dealing with the crucible of crisis.

We have seen that David messed up big time at a point well into his reign as king. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and followed that up by killing her husband Uriah. Eventually David was confronted by the prophet Nathan and confessed to his wrongdoing. God forgave him, but He also explained that there would be negative consequences that would come from this and that would involve his family.

So we saw in #13 of 2 Samuel that his oldest son Amnon, and the apparent heir to the throne, raped his half-sister Tamar. David didn't do anything about it. So Tamar's brother two years later killed Amnon. This Absalom was next in line to the throne, but he fled the country in fear for what David might do. David again did nothing.

At General Joab's urging David finally brought Absalom back, but he did not want to see his son face-to-face. It took two years before there was some kind of reconciliation. Absalom never admitted any wrongdoing, and David never gave any complete forgiveness. The resentment building up in Absalom comes to full fruition in our passage today.

I.

So in the first twelve verses of #15 in 2 Samuel (which is found on p. 266 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we encounter CRITICS, CONSPIRACIES, AND CLASHING WITH GOD. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. CRITICS, CONSPIRACIES, AND CLASHING WITH GOD.) The reunion between father and son was described in the last verse of #14: **"Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom."** Superficially it might look like the relationship is going to work out, but now we will see how events unfold in #15.

According to v. 1, **"After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him."** The first question that comes to my mind is: "Where did he get the money to do this?" He probably has a royal allowance, Apparently he is the crown prince. His grandfather was the king of Geshur. Maybe he got money from him.

But then why does Absalom need a chariot and horses and fifty runners? Jerusalem and the surrounding area is hilly. It is not ideal terrain to use a chariot. Then if you have fifty runners going before the chariot,

you can't go very fast anyway. It seems to me that this is all about status. This is about appearances. Absalom wants to look like a king.

I don't recall that we are ever told anything about the car that David drives. I am sure that David had nice things. We are told about a palace that he built. But David, despite his flaws, is more concerned about character and service to God. We always need to be careful about people who are all about status, who are focused on impressing people with the stuff that they have or their rank on the social scale.

Verses 2 & 3 tell us, **“And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, ‘From what city are you?’ And when he said, ‘Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,’ Absalom would say to him, ‘See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you.’”** The gate of a city was the place where business and legal matters were typically transacted. It may be that David at this time held court in his palace. Perhaps Absalom met people at the main gate as they were headed to see the king.

Immediately we see a problem with Absalom's behavior. He is undermining the authority of his father. He is charging that the bureaucracy is tough to negotiate. The king and his people don't really care very much. It will be hard to get justice from this administration. Yet we saw last week in the previous chapter that a woman from Tekoa appeared to have little difficulty in getting an audience with the king. So we have to question the truth of his charge.

Verse 4: **“Then Absalom would say, ‘Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.’”** So now Absalom's agenda is clear. He wants his dad's job. It is doubtful that Absalom does any investigation other than listening to each man's story and agreeing with his view of justice. Yes, black lives matter. Yes, tribal rights matter. Yes, the police were unfair.

This is the consummate politician who is out of office but seeking to be in office. He can promise everything and claim no cost to anything. He or she does not have to make any hard decisions until he or she is in office.

Perhaps King David also was slipping a little. He was in his sixties by this time, and his administration had been racked by scandal. He had been guilty of adultery and murder. He had been passive in dealing with difficulties in his family. Perhaps he had lost some focus on the proper administration of justice. Probably his approval rating had dropped in the polls.

Verse 5: **“And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him [Absalom], he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him.”** His was the common man approach. I may have a Mercedes chariot, but I am approachable. You don’t have to bow down to me. I am one of you.

Verse 6: **“Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.”** David says in the preface to Psalm 3 that he wrote the words there in regard to his flight from Absalom. (PSALM 3:1-2) In the first two verses of Psalm 3 he writes, **“O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul there is no salvation for him in God.”** David is done for now.

In the early Jewish commentary on these verses the author gives this interpretation (MIDRASH TANHUMA), **“They were saying of David: ‘(How) can there be a salvation for a man who had taken the lamb captive and slew the shepherd and who called Israel to fall by the sword?’** In other words, how can there be hope for David who took Bathsheba, the little lamb, and killed her husband Uriah, the shepherd. This is also the king who made his army go into battle and has caused many Jewish casualties as a result. He is sure to lose the next election, and he has fallen out of favor with both God and man. (PROJECTOR OFF)

People are fickle. They have short memories. This is thirty years into David’s rule, and the young people don’t know history. David is the king who led the human effort to bring the nation together. He is the one who has led the country in defeating their surrounding enemies. He is the one who has been given divine promises by the God of Israel.

It is a similar problem today. Young people are intent upon creating mayhem and tearing down statues, even statues of American heroes like Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant. They don’t know American history. An outfit called the Intercollegiate Studies Institute conducted a test of 7000 college seniors from 50 American colleges and universities a few years ago. The students were tested on their knowledge of history, government, international relations, and the economy. The average score was 54.2%. Even most of the Ivy League students flunked.

So it is that people are taken in by the cultural trends of the day. Even Christians are taken in by current values. Not only do they fall short of their understanding of history, they don't know the Bible. They decide that gay marriage is OK and abortion is OK. In a nationwide survey the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University found that 69% of American adults believe that people are basically good. (American World View Inventory 2020)

If people are basically good, then perhaps we can defund the police. Even 52% of evangelicals agreed with this claim. If people are basically good, then why do we need a Savior? Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? The Bible, however, teaches the doctrine of total depravity. That doesn't mean that we are all as bad as we could be. It means that every area of our lives is negatively affected by sin.

This same survey also found that only 39% of Americans believe that life is sacred, defined as meaning "having unconditional, intrinsic worth." Fortunately a majority of evangelicals agreed that life is sacred. But still 40% of Americans who identified themselves as evangelicals said that they did not believe that human life is sacred. This is terrible. It does explain why abortion has become pervasive in our country and why euthanasia has been allowed to gain a foothold. This is why it is fine to destroy a fetus if it has some hint of abnormality. This is part of the reason why women and minorities have too often been treated poorly.

While the Bible says that we all are basically sinful, it also says that we have infinite value and worth. For we were all created in the image of God. In Genesis #1 v. 27 (GENESIS 1:27) we are told, **"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."** As God's image bearers, we all have infinite value and worth.

Our text says that the hearts of the people were stolen away. In our evangelical culture this too often happens with some megachurch pastors and too many TV preachers. The goal of life is portrayed as being happy and fulfilled. We are all OK, and we just need more self-confidence and the right faith formula, and then we can be healthy and prosperous, which is God's desire for all of us. Jesus, somehow, didn't get that memo. For he had a short earthly life with few possessions and suffered a horrible death. Yet the model and example he left us was expressed in Mark #10 v. 45. (MARK 10:45) There He proclaimed, **"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

In our passage King David seemed to be oblivious to what his son was doing. Perhaps he was distracted by other business. Perhaps he was depressed by his recent failures and family disappointments. Perhaps he thought that his son's behavior was appropriate for the crown prince. (PROJECTOR OFF)

We read in vv. 7-9, **“And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, ‘Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, ‘If the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the Lord.’”** The king said to him, **‘Go in peace.’ So he arose and went to Hebron.**” Apparently Absalom's supposed worship will involve some kind of animal sacrifice. David's words turn out to be his last conversation with his son.

Absalom sounds spiritual. We parents want to believe that our kids are following God, especially when they use religious language. But here it is all a lie. We find no evidence that Absalom has any kind of true relationship with the God of Israel. It is a snow job. But apparently Absalom is winning votes.

Hebron is a few miles south of Bethlehem, which is a few miles south of Jerusalem. It is the place where David began his reign. It is where Absalom was born. Even today politicians often return to their hometowns to announce their candidacies for high office. Such it is for Absalom.

Verse 10: **“But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, ‘As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, ‘Absalom is king at Hebron!’”** This appears to be an organized conspiracy. Trumpets will be the means of long distance communication with the supporters whom he has established throughout the country in a way similar to how native Americans once communicated with others through smoke signals.

Verse 11: **“With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing.”** These were apparently important people who were not a direct part of the conspiracy. It is not clear how they were intended to be used. Perhaps they were hostages whose captivity would force prominent families to go along with the conspiracy. Perhaps they simply were prominent people who would hear Absalom's announcement of his plans in front of a large crowd and would be pressured into going along with this show of power.

Verse 12: **“And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept**

increasing.” Ahithophel was a friend and an advisor to the king who is going to turn on him. He is also the father of Eliam who is the father of Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 23:34) So perhaps Ahithophel has been unhappy with how David treated his granddaughter and her husband. Ahithophel was from Giloh, which was near Hebron.

So here is the crisis and the conspiracy and the clash with God. It is a revolt organized by David's son. By tradition Absalom was scheduled to be king some day by virtue of being the oldest son of the king. But he does not want to wait. We explained last week that resentment has built up in his life. That resentment now comes to fruition. Absalom has great desires. He is clever. He is organized. But he has no depth of character. He is ungrateful and critical. He is a religious hypocrite. He is evil.

Occasionally we find such people in our businesses, in our schools, in our families, and even in our churches. In 2 Corinthians #11 vv. 13-15 (2 CORINTHIANS 11:13-14) the Apostle Paul warned his fellow believers, **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (2 CORINTHIANS 11:15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”**

II.

In the rest of #15 we deal with FEAR, FLIGHT, AND FAITH IN GOD. (II. FEAR, FLIGHT, AND FAITH IN GOD) According to v. 13, **“And a messenger came to David, saying, ‘The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.’”** I suspect that David's first reaction was shock. Then it was followed by fear. Such was my reaction to my bad church experience. Such is the reaction that some of you have faced when you have suddenly been put in the crucible of crisis.

Notice what David did next. Verse 14 says, **“Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, ‘Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword.’”**

Perhaps his fear was overblown. We have seen that Jerusalem was a substantial fortress. Before David conquered the city, the Jebusites had bragged that the lame and the blind could defend it. But perhaps he was concerned about exposing his fellow residents to danger and the hardships of a siege. Perhaps he was uncertain about the loyalties of the people who were there. In any event David's fear turns into flight.

Verse 15: **“And the king's servants said to the king, ‘Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides.’”** At least David has support from his inner circle. Verse 16: **“So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house.”** How do you suppose these women felt, being left behind--- being treated like pawns sacrificed in a chess game? Certainly they were not being treated as well as the wives who were regarded as valuable enough to be brought along on David’s flight.

According to vv. 17 & 18, **“And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house. And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king.”** Cherethites and Pelethites and natives of Gath were Philistines. But not all of these people were actually Philistines. For we know from our earlier studies that there were men from other tribes of Israel who joined David when he was on the run from Saul and when he stayed for a time in Philistine territory. This original group of 600 warriors and supporters had remained with David when he became king. They seemed to have served as a palace guard, his most reliable soldiers who stayed closest to the king. They are called Gittites here probably because of their presence with David when he was a fugitive in Gath.

Verses 19-21: **“Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, ‘Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you.’ But Ittai answered the king, ‘As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.’”**

Ittai is a newcomer from Gath. He has just showed up on the scene to serve in the administration of King David. The king recognizes the hardships that may come upon this guy So he gives him an easy out. But Ittai makes a double oath to follow David. He is a true and unexpected friend.

In my crisis years ago there were surprises about who turned out to be supporters of us. Some of them were newcomers to the church. I checked online this week to see what is going on with that congregation and discovered that they have gone out of existence.

In crisis situations we find out who are our true friends. Sometimes there are surprises. Sometimes there are disappointments. There were two guys who were fishing together up in Montana. They were startled when they saw a hungry grizzly bear suddenly heading in their direction. One of the guys, before

he ran, stopped and kicked off his boots and put on a pair of tennis shoes. His partner yelled, "Why are you putting on your tennis shoes. Everybody knows that you can't outrun a grizzly bear." The other guy replied, "True. But I may be able to outrun you."

We need true friends in times of difficulty. Proverbs #18 v. 24 (PROVERBS 18:24) contains this bit of wisdom: **"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."** This is the kind of person whom we need in a crisis.

Jackie Robinson had a crisis when he broke through the color barrier and became a star for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He took a lot of grief from fans and other baseball players just because of his skin color. Through it all he maintained his Christian testimony and kept his composure. The movie "42" tells the story about how Jackie Robinson first played with the Dodgers in Cincinnati and heard a lot of boos from the crowd. (JACKIE ROBINSON) Pee Wee Reese, who was playing shortstop, supposedly went over to Jackie and put his arm around him, quieting the crowd.

(JACKIE ROBINSON STATUE) This statue was erected outside of the Brooklyn Cyclones stadium in 2005 to commemorate that incident and that friendship. Robinson's widow spoke at the dedication of that statue, saying, **"It's a historic symbol of a wonderful legacy of friendship, of teamwork, of courage -- of a lot of things we hope we will be able to pass on to young people. And we hope they will be motivated by it, be inspired by it and think about what it would be like to stand up, dare to challenge the status quo and find a friend there who will come over and support you."** Unfortunately this statue was recently defaced in the protests and demonstrations in New York City.

Verse 22: (PROJECTOR OFF) **"And David said to Ittai, 'Go then, pass on.' So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him."** Families are being uprooted by this coup.

Verse 23: **"And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness."** This group of fleeing refugees is going east from Jerusalem down over the Kidron brook and up over the Mount of Olives and down toward the Jordan River.

Verse 24: **"And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the**

city.” This additional set of friends is comprised of the clergy, the priests. They are more tuned in to the promises that God has made to David.

Verses 25 & 26: **“Then the king said to Zadok, ‘Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. But if he says, ‘I have no pleasure in you,’ behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him.’”** David has a good theological foundation, which is important in a crisis. He knows that having a religious symbol in his possession, though it is an important one, is no guarantee of God’s favor. The presence and power of God is what is important, and that is not dependent upon any physical object.

David is here demonstrating humility and faith in God. He is casting himself upon God’s providential care. But this does not mean that he is passive. He is not just letting go and letting God. He is taking responsibility for the things in his power.

We see what he does in vv. 27-29: **“The king also said to Zadok the priest, ‘Are you not a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.’ So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.”**

There is considerable debate about the proper translation of the clause in v. 27: “Are you not a seer?” Is it a question, or a command? I think that it makes most sense if it is understood as not saying that these priests have a prophetic gift but rather that they can observe what is going on in Jerusalem. They can then pass along information about Absalom’s plans to David. So the king is setting up an intelligence network.

Verse 30: **“But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.”** There are foreshadowings which I think we are expected to pick up here about the future Son of David. For one day Jesus would cross the Kidron with His disciples and hang out in Gethsemane where He would cry out to God. Earlier in that week He would look over the city of Jerusalem and predict its destruction by the Romans.

Upon His initial entrance into the city in that Easter week Jesus would weep on the Mount of Olives as He looked upon the city of Jerusalem, realizing not only his own rejection but also the city’s future

destruction. (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 19:41) According to Luke #19 v. 41, **“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it...”** Also from this same hill where David was weeping Jesus would one day ascend into heaven.

Verse 31: (PROJECTOR OFF) **“And it was told David, ‘Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.’ And David said, ‘O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.’”** David recognizes that the presence of this very wise counselor with Absalom presents a dangerous threat. This is a friend who has turned on him. That betrayal may have something to do with how David had treated his granddaughter.

David may well have been speaking about Ahithophel in Psalm 41 v. 9 (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 41:9) when he wrote, **“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”** Jesus will one day quote this verse while speaking of Judas Iscariot, who is about to betray Him. Ahithophel is a type of Judas. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Notice also David’s short, but heartfelt, prayer in v. 31. Prayers don’t have to be long to be effective. This prayer is about to get a quick answer. For we read in v. 32, **“While David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head.”** This is another friend who is a high-level advisor.

Verses 33-36: **“David said to him, ‘If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,’ then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel. Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So whatever you hear from the king's house, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son, and by them you shall send to me everything you hear.”** Thus David is continuing to develop an intelligence network.

Verse 37: **“So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.”** The stage is thus set for a battle with Absalom. What begins with fear and flight for David ends with a plan that is the result of faith in God.

There would be many situations in Jerusalem in the following centuries when its citizens would be faced with crises, when people would deal with fear that would sometimes lead to flight. In the seventh

century AD the Muslims would conquer the city. By the end of the tenth century Christian pilgrims were being robbed and shaken down when they tried to visit the Holy Land. Pope Urban II organized the First Crusade to take back the Holy Land. After a long trek the ragtag band of warriors made it to Jerusalem.

Their spiritual leader encouraged them to fast, do penance, and march around the city. They did that, and the Muslim defenders watched in amazement as this band of unarmed warriors walked barefoot around Jerusalem. The European army concluded its march at the Mount of Olives. A guy named Peter the Hermit delivered an inspiring sermon. About a week later the walls were breached, and the city was captured..

There was much that was not Christian about this crusade and its fighters, but some seemed to have a genuine faith in God. Historian Thomas Madden says, **“Against all odds, this struggling, fractious, and naive enterprise had made its way from western Europe to the Middle East and conquered two of the best-defended cities in the Western world. From a modern perspective, one can only marvel at the improbable course of events that led to these victories. Medieval men and women did not marvel; they merely thanked God. For them, the agent of the crusade’s victory was God himself, who had worked miracle after miracle for his faithful knights, delivering unto them the land of Christ.”**

(Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades*, p. 32)

There are crises that many of us face or will face. There will be fortresses that will seem impossible to conquer. These situations will cause fear in us. But these will also be opportunities for faith. Trust in God will ultimately produce the divine results which the Lord desires.