**David brought back to Jerusalem** 23/7/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 19:1-23, 2Samuel 19:24-43,

Text: 2Samuel 19:9-43

Psalms: 130, 25:8-15, 90:11-17, 134

Some years go an elder was brought before a church court to answer questions about his public behaviour. One man on the court was insistent that he admit his sin and repent; the elder was removed from his office in the church. Years later the man insisting that this elder admit his sin and repent was asked to do the same thing in the same court. He was similarly removed as an office-bearer in the church.

Jesus said, ‘Judge not that you be not judged’ (Mat 7:1). These words are often misused to claim that we have no right to judge anyone, but they are simply a warning to be slow and careful in making any judgment, taking note of the plank that is in your own eye. Jesus used the word, ‘hypocrite’, telling us to remove the plank in our own eye before focusing on the speck in our brother’s eye.

When we first met David he was a godly and brave boy. He was chosen by the Lord and anointed as king. He was severely tested as Saul chased him, trying to kill him; David refused to harm the Lord’s anointed, King Saul. David became king of Israel in Hebron and then in Jerusalem. He was from the tribe of Judah while Saul from Benjamin. There were twelve tribes in all. David was a good king who, with God’s help, defeated the enemies of Israel and established worship in Jerusalem.

But everything changed that fateful day when, while idle and roaming on the roof of the palace he saw Bathsheba bathing, and committed adultery with her. The Lord forgave his sin but he had to live with consequences that came from that sin. While the Lord struck the child born of his adultery, the other consequences stemmed largely from his sense of guilt and inadequacy in making decisions, particular decisions and justice relating to his own family. We have previously noted David’s failure to consult the Lord after his sin, although he did pray for the Lord to overturn to advice of Ahithophel.

When David’s son conspired against him, David fled the palace, thereby avoiding bloodshed. But Absalom pursued him across the Jordan before being killed in the brief but bloody civil war. Actually, Joab killed the defenceless Absalom in direct disobedience to David’s command. The king’s palace that David had fled, leaving ten concubines behind, was briefly occupied by Absalom but was now deserted. The land was in limbo; it was without an incumbent king.

While David fled to avoid bloodshed involving his treacherous son, there was a lot of bloodshed anyway, and Absalom was also dead (18:7, 15). People were asking why their king had so quickly deserted them, a man who had led the armies of Israel in victory over all their enemies, foreign enemies. Here in chapter 19 we see David returning to Jerusalem and to his throne. But is he the same man who fled, and more to the point, the same man who ruled Israel before his sin? Our subheading are: ‘Politics but no prayer’, ‘Prostrating, praise and parting loyalty’, and, ‘Partisanship in Israel’.

**1. Politics but no prayer**

Remember we said that there were no winners in a civil war. In Israel the treacherous son of the king was dead and the king was mourning for his son. The land was in limbo, left without a king. As a federation of twelve tribes, Israel needed strong leadership. Such leadership was lacking at this time and the tribes started arguing about the future. David was still alive and many wanted him back. They remembered the ‘good old days’ when David defeated the Philistines and all other enemies; maybe they worried that the Philistines might step into this power vacuum in Israel. But when David failed to stand up to Absalom some threw their lot in with Absalom. Now he was dead, what would they do?

A call to bring David back started to be heard from around Israel (19:10). But David heard nothing from Jerusalem and his own tribe of Judah. He called on the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, to speak to the elders of Israel: ‘Why are you the last to bring the king back’ (19:11, 12). Many elders had sided with Absalom so probably feared reprisal at the hand of David and Joab. Kings do not like traitors and in those days killed them; Putin and others do the same today!

David the politician moved quickly to allay fears of retaliation by appointing Amasa to replace Joab as his army general. Amasa was his own flesh and blood (19:13), but had been Absalom’s general, so clearly David was forgiving him. David was also unhappy with Joab who kept challenging his authority as king. It was a politically astute move, but did David or Amasa realise Amasa was being given a poisoned chalice! The fears of the men of Judah were relieved, and as one voice they called for David to return to Jerusalem with all his servants (19:14).

**2. Prostrating, praise, and parting loyalty**

This subheading points to three people who feature in David’s return to Jerusalem, to his crossing of the Jordan from east to west. They are all men who featured in his crossing in the other direction, from west to east, as he fled Jerusalem just days or weeks before. The people of Judah called for David to return, and they came down to the Jordan, to the town of Gilgal, to welcome him back (19:15).

Within this welcoming gathering was a man called Shimei, from the tribe of Benjamin. This man had more to fear from David’s return than most. You will recall Shimei cursing David and throwing stones at him as he passed through Shimei’s home town of Bahurim (16:6-8). Abishai, Joab’s brother, wanted to kill Shimei at that time and still wanted to remove his head (19:21). But David again stopped this violent brother of violent Joab. David demonstrated a rare show of decisiveness and authority in reprimanding Abishai, and indirectly Joab (19:22).

Shimei hurried to see David and show sincere repentance for his previous behaviour; when you need to repent it is best to move quickly as Shimei did. He fell prostrate before David pleading forgiveness for what he had done. He said, ‘I have sinned’ (19:20). He wanted David to forgive and forget what he had done. It took a lot of courage for this man to come before David, to come as the first of ‘all the house of Joseph’ (19:20); Shimei was from Benjamin, a small tribe, but joined with the large tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh rather than Judah.

David was glad to be heading back to Jerusalem. He did not want to engage in reprisals that day, so swore to Shimei, ‘You shall not die’ (19:23). It took a lot of grace for David to forgive this man who cursed him. Maybe David felt guilt for his own sin and remembered God’s forgiveness. But David never forgot how Shimei cursed him that day he fled Jerusalem, and although promising not to kill him, David did instruct his son Solomon to, ‘Bring his grey hair down to the grave with blood’ (1Kings 2:9).

Also there to meet David as he returned was Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth ate at the king’s table but did not flee with the king. His servant, Ziba, told David that Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson, was hoping the kingdom would be restored to him (16:3). But Mephibosheth had a different story to tell when he met David returning to Jerusalem. He said Ziba had doubled-crossed him, saying he would saddle him a donkey but left without him; he also slandered him before David, as just mentioned. David believed Ziba at the time and gave him all the farm that Mephibosheth inherited, but now he did not know who to believe. Hastily David divided the farm between them, the master and the servant (19:29).

Mephibosheth was full of praise for David, describing him as, ‘like an angel of God’ (19:27). But more than words, Mephibosheth demonstrated loyalty to David in his looks and behaviour. His long hair and fingernails, and his dirty clothes, were evidence of mourning, not of a readiness to rule. Moreover, telling David to give all the farm to Ziba showed he was just happy to see David back (19:24,30). Solomon would be called upon to decide which of two women was telling the truth with regard to a baby, and did so with wisdom that his father David was not demonstrating.

The third and last of the men to greet David on his return was Barzillai the Gileadite (19:31). In fact he was not greeting David but came to wish him well as he returned from Gilead to Judah. David urged him to come and live in the palace because he had been so kind and helpful to David in his time of need. But Barzillai was old, eighty years old, and his faculties were fading. Palace life was not for him. He wanted to go to his own home and die there.

Barzillai suggested that David take Chimham, probably his own son, in his place, and David agreed. So David and his loyal friend, Barzillai, parted with a kiss and a blessing, and then David crossed over the Jordan. The Hebrew language is not clear but it is unlikely that Barzillai crossed the river; and the parting probably occurred before the meeting with Shimei and Mephibosheth, at Gilgal and Jerusalem respectively. Chimham crossed the Jordan with David and presumably went to live in the palace. If he was as loyal as Barzillai, David would have counted him a blessing. He was otherwise surrounded by men like Shimei, Mephibosheth, and Ziba, not to mention Joab and Abishai!

**3. Partisanship in Israel**

All the people of Judah and half the people of Israel escorted David from the Jordan to Jerusalem (19:40). The rest of Israel showed up afterwards it seems, and started complaining against the men of Judah. The men of Israel were the first to call for David to be brought back, but the men of Judah stepped forward to bring him back. The men of Israel felt sidelined, and there is nothing like being sidelined or overlooked to stir up anger in a person or a group.

A wise king would have acted quickly to quell such feelings and unite the people but David did nothing. The men of Judah made things worse by claiming David as a ‘close relative’, although they denied any favouritism from the king (19:24). As we just said, David did nothing to stop this bickering, and nor did he pray. When people are in dispute it is always good to bring them before the Lord in prayer.

The division between Judah, including Simeon, and the other ten tribes in the north continued to grow. We know that after some years, in the time of King Rehoboam, the kingdom of Israel was actually split in two. The seeds of this division are seen here in the return of David as king of all Israel. The men of Judah claimed David as their close relative. The men of Israel claimed they had ten shares in the king and therefore more right to David. A bitter dispute arose on the day they should all have been rejoicing in having David back as their king.

How often does it happen that at a time of celebration and happiness, at a wedding for example, a family dispute erupts? Even in the church when we should all be rejoicing in our Lord Jesus Christ and his grace towards us, bitter disputes can harm and even break the fellowship, fellowship between brothers and sisters in the Lord. Pray that leaders, and all in our church, will be doing their utmost to maintain unity in spirit and truth.