

April 19: 1 Samuel 25-26 and Luke 16:19-31

Samuel passes away. All of Israel gathers to mourn him. Afterwards, David went to the Wilderness of Paran. While he is there he learns that Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, is shearing sheep. The sheering of sheep was a festive occasion because wool was a valuable commodity. Nabal should have been in a better mood to help David out. However, Nabal compares David to a runaway slave and refuses help. David is enraged when he receives Nabal's answer, telling his men to take up their swords. David does not take vengeance because one of Nabal's men is smart enough to tell Abigail, his wife, about her husband's folly. She brings gifts to David and his anger subsides. After her encounter with David, Abigail returns home to find that Nabal is drunk from the festivities. When he wakes up the following morning, she tells him about what has happened. Nabal hears it, has a seizure, becomes paralyzed, and dies 10 days later. David learns that Abigail is now a widow, so he sends his men to offer his marriage proposal. She agrees. David also marries Ahinoam. Meanwhile, Michal has been given by Saul to Palti.

We see Saul struggle more with his inner demons about David. Even though Saul had promised earlier that he would not harm David after his life was spared, Saul is back on the hunt. David and his men come upon Saul while he is sleeping. Abishai, one of David's men, requests to take Saul's spear and thrust him through. His thought is that the king has been delivered by The LORD. All he needs to do is run him through with the spear once. David again spares Saul's life. However, they take his spear and his water jug. Then they confront Saul's bodyguard, asking why he did not protect the king. Again, Saul claims that he will not harm David.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is living in excess. All his needs are met. He has plenty. Meanwhile, poor Lazarus sits outside the gates, destitute. He longs to eat the scraps of the rich man, but instead the dogs come and lick his sores. Lazarus and the rich man die. The rich man suffers in the fiery pit. Lazarus is taken up into heaven with Abraham. The rich man looks beyond the divide and asks Abraham for relief. He is told that they cannot cross the chasm. The rich man then requests that he be sent to warn his five brothers. Abraham explains that they have Moses and the prophets. If they listen to them, they will be okay. The rich man retorts, explaining that if he is raised from the dead, they will believe and repent. Again, Abraham denies the request and informs him that if they don't listen to Moses, they will not be convinced even if a person is brought back from the dead.

In our lives, some people will not believe no matter how much evidence is given to them. It does not mean that we should stop presenting the evidence. However, when people fail to come to belief, we should not consider that our failure. As sad as it is, some folks will just not come to believe.

April 20: 1 Samuel 27-29 and Luke 17: 1-19

David realizes that he is not safe by Saul's side, regardless of what Saul says. So, he flees to Ziklag with his men and his wives (except for Michal). David approaches Achish, requesting a place in one of the outlying towns. Achish gives Ziklag to David.

The Philistines bring their military units together. Saul is terrified at the massive amount of troops. He consults The LORD, but hears nothing back from Him. Saul has no dreams or any other indication of how the battle is going to break out. Since, God is silent, Saul decides to take matters into his own hands. He tells his men to find a medium to bring up Samuel. Saul had earlier put a ban on all mediums and spiritists, stating that they will be executed. Saul considers himself above the law and completely disregards the law he put into effect!

The medium brings up Samuel. The spirit explains that God has abandoned Saul and the kingdom is David's. When Saul goes out to fight the Philistines, he and his sons will die and they will join Samuel in death. Upon hearing this, Saul falls flat on the ground with terror.

As the Philistines are gathering their troops, they see that David is amongst the fighting men. After a little discussion, they send David away. He will not fight alongside the Philistines.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus warns the people that offenses are headed their way. He also tells them that if their brother sins, they should call their brother out on it. If the brother repents, then they are to forgive him. We are not called to judge. Jesus warns not to judge. However, as believers, we are encouraged to hold each other accountable. When we hold one another accountable, it must be done in love, not in judgment. Only God can be the judge.

Jesus also explains that service is a thankless job. The disciples should not be in this with the expectation people are going to be impressed with them and heap thanks and praise on them. After all, if a servant is told to prepare something, is he thanked when he does it? I believe the servant should be thanked, but not everyone sees it that way. As servants, we should not serve with the expectation of being thanked.

Christ's point is proven further when He heals ten men from leprosy. Out of the ten that were healed, only one gave praises to God and went back to thank Him. If 90 percent of folks that were healed from a terrible skin disease aren't willing to go and give thanks to God for His healing, why should we expect to be treated any better?

April 21: 1 Samuel 30-31 and Luke 17: 20-37

David and his men return to Ziklag to find that everything is gone. The Amalekites raided their town and took their wives and children. There was wailing and gnashing of teeth from all of the men. David requested the ephod be brought out. He asks The LORD if they should pursue the Amalekites. God gives the okay and David heads out with his men. When they made it to Wadi Besor, 200 of the men stopped the journey. They were too tired from their mourning. Grief can exhaust a person. Those 200 stayed behind while David and the other 400 marched against the Amalekites and had a decisive victory. They retrieved their wives and children along with a lot of plunder.

When the conquerors returned, the 400 men that fought did not want to give anything to the 200 that stayed at Wadi Besor. They only wanted to give back the wives and children to these men. David rebukes them, telling them that it was God that gave them this victory. God was generous toward them, so they should be generous toward others.

Saul and his sons are involved in conflict with the Philistines. An archer gets Saul with a fatal strike. However, the king did not die immediately, so he asks his servant to draw his sword and kill him. He is worried that the Philistines will capture him and torture him. The servant refuses, so Saul draws his sword and falls on it. The servant witnesses this and responds by falling on his sword. Saul and his sons died that day in battle, just as it had been predicted a few chapters ago. The men of Beth-Shan retrieve the bodies in the cover of night. This was risky since the Philistines still occupied the land. They then burned the bodies. This burning was not cremation. Instead, the burning removed the flesh, leaving the bones behind. This was done to prevent abuse of the corpses by wild animals.

In the Luke reading, Jesus tells the disciples about the end times. He explains that it will happen suddenly. There will be people proclaiming that it is coming, but they should not follow them. The end cannot be predicted. It will be like in the days of Noah. No one knew that it was going to happen, so they continued living their lives. The disciples should not spend their days looking at the sky for Jesus's return. It will happen when it is supposed to happen. Instead, they should be out doing The LORD's work.

April 22: 2 Samuel 1-3 and Luke 18:1-17

Saul is dead. This should have made things easy for David since he had been anointed as king earlier. That is not the case. David learns that Saul has passed by an Amalekite. David asks how he knows that Saul is dead. The man gives a different account to what actually happened. He says that he saw Saul trying to kill himself, so he went over and finished Saul off. As proof that he was in Gilboa, he has brought Saul's crown and armband. There are two possibilities to the man's story. One proposal is that he saw Saul after he had fallen on his sword and was still alive, but just barely, so the man put Saul out of his misery. The more likely explanation is that he found Saul's body after he had died, but he grabbed the crown and armband to show David. The man thought that he would receive a reward for claiming responsibility for the killing. That is not the case and he is put to death because of his claim.

It takes several years for David to take the throne. This shows us just how long and arduous the civil war was between David's camp and Saul's camp. There was no peaceful transfer of power. Instead, Saul's family made it difficult for David to gain power. In all of the turmoil, David remains faithful and dedicated, making vows and sticking to them. The people are pleased to see that, unlike Saul, when David says he will do something he does it.

In the New Testament reading Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow. The widow was not getting the justice against her adversary, so she hounds the judge until he relents and gives her the justice she seeks. Jesus also tells the parable of the tax collector and Pharisee that go to pray. The Pharisee stands there proudly, thanking God for making him so great and not like the lowly tax collector. Meanwhile, the tax collector is on his knees praying, "Forgive me, LORD, sinner that I am." The tax collector had the better prayer because he is not puffed up and full of himself.

April 23: 2 Samuel 4-6 and Luke 18:18-43

Ish-bosheth, one of Saul's descendants is executed by some of David's men. David did not order the execution, they took it upon themselves to perform this heinous act. When they bring his head to David, David asks them why they would think they are treated any differently than the man that claimed to kill Saul. Their hands and feet are cut off and their bodies are hung by the pool of Hebron. Ish-bosheth's head was buried in Abner's tomb.

David is now king of Israel. The people come to him and explain that they have followed him, even before he took the throne. In their estimation, David acted more like a king than Saul did. Since they saw David's leadership early on, they began to follow him. I think one thing we can learn from this interaction is that we should never underestimate the impact we can have in the world by being consistent and seeking to do the right thing regardless of what is happening. David spent a lot of his time hiding from Saul. Even when he had the opportunity to strike Saul and kill him, David did not do it. This left an impact on the people. They followed him before and they will continue to follow him.

David goes against the Philistines and defeats them. The Israelites now reclaim the ark of the covenant that had been lost many years before. David and the men are excited to get it home. So, they put it on a cart and start taking it back. This is NOT how The LORD had commanded the ark be handled. As they are going along, Uzzah reaches out to steady the ark as the oxen stumble. God strikes Uzzah dead. Even after all these years, God's standards have not changed. David has the ark carried back exactly as He had specified. As they are returning, David is jumping and dancing, giving praise for such a momentous occasion. Michal, his wife, (but now referred to as Saul's daughter) looks on him with disdain. The deep love that she had for David at first has now turned to hatred. Her bitterness prevents her from having any children.

In the New Testament reading, we read the story of the rich young ruler. The rich man wants to follow Jesus, but when he realizes he must give up his belongings, he walks away sad. This is not to say that we must give up all our possessions when we become followers of Christ. However, it does mean we must love Jesus more than anything else. We can't take any of this stuff with us. No need to cling to it. Everything on this earth will fade. Jesus predicts His death again. The disciples do not understand what He is saying. They will find out one day what He meant.

April 24: 2 Samuel 7-9 and Luke 19:1-28

David is experiencing peace throughout the lands. Since his enemies are not currently after him, he decides that he wants to make The LORD a house. He talks to his friend Nathan the prophet about it. Nathan thinks it is a great idea and tells him to "do all that is in his heart because the LORD is with you." It is true that The LORD is with David, but God does not want him to build a house for Him. Nathan is corrected by God and He gives him a message to take to David. David will not build the temple, but his son Solomon will.

When we want to do something, we should definitely check with The LORD before we go that route. It seemed great on the surface, but it was not meant to be. Had he tried to build the temple, it would have failed spectacularly.

David takes up arms against the Philistines again and defeats them. After his victory, David sets out to finding any descendants of Saul. Though Saul had been terrible to David, his sons were not. David wants to show them favor. They find Mephibosheth. He was the son of Jonathan that had been injured. David makes provision for him and his family. Mephibosheth will always dine at David's table.

In the Luke reading, we read about Zaccheus, a tax collector, trying to get a look at Jesus as the crowd is passing. Zaccheus is a short man, so he climbs up a tree to see Jesus. When Christ sees him, He tells him that He must come to eat at Zaccheus's house that day. The people were upset that Jesus would spend any time with a sinful person like a tax collector. One thing is for sure, God loves everyone. He even loves the people we have a hard time loving.

Jesus also tells the parable of the talents. A master is leaving and gives his servants talents to use while he is gone. Two of them invest the talents, one does not. The ones that took the talents and used them to make more were rewarded. The one that had kept his talent safe, had his taken away. God has given us talents. We are not called to hide those talents away. We are called to use those talents and gifts to further His kingdom.

April 25: 2 Samuel 10-12 and Luke 19:29-48

Hanun's father, the king of the Ammonites died. David sent men to him to offer words of condolences since Hanun's father had been so kind to David. Unfortunately, Hanun's friends convinced him that David had ulterior motives. He called for David's men to be rounded up and humiliated by shaving half of their beards and cutting their clothes in half. The Ammonites develop an alliance with the Arameans. However, the Arameans flee during the battle and David kills 700 charioteers and 40,000 foot soldiers.

Things are going great for David, until they are not. We are told that the kings would gather in the spring to march out to war. David was king, but decided to send Joab and the men to do the fighting while he stayed home. That was his first mistake. Had he been out with his troops like he was supposed to be, then he would not have been present to see Bathsheba. The text describes Bathsheba as being very beautiful. David sees her bathing after her monthly impurity. He has her sent for and he sleeps with her and sends her home. After a while, she sends word that she is pregnant. David does not panic at first. He sends for Uriah, her husband, from the front line. He assumes that he will be able to get Uriah to go home and sleep with her, then he will think the baby is his. Uriah does not go home, though. His brothers are out on the field fighting, so he will not go and enjoy his home while they are still there. Even after getting Uriah drunk, he does not go home. So David sends Uriah back to battle with a letter for Joab. They are to withdraw during the fiercest fighting leaving Uriah to be killed. What amazes me is Uriah's dedication to David. He assumed David was on the up and up rather than thinking he was plotting something. Most people probably would have read the letter, but Uriah did not. He trusted David. Even the men on the battlefield trusted David. That is why when they are sending word back to him about their defeat they tell the messenger to ask why the king would have them get so close. The messenger is also to remind David of defeats when the soldiers got

close to the city gates. No one thought for a second that David was enacting a plan to assassinate Uriah.

The only person other than David to know what he had done was Nathan. Nathan calls him out using a parable. Finally, David admits guilt. His life will be spared, but the son Bathsheba is carrying will die. After seven days, the baby dies. Afterwards, David comforts Bathsheba, she conceives and gives birth to Solomon, the next king of Israel.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem. He rides in on a colt, fulfilling OT prophecy. Jesus goes into the Temple Complex and cleans it out. The people had been exchanging money and selling sacrificial animals in the complex. The problem was not so much the exchanging and selling animals, but the attitude. It was the attitude that was the problem. Worshipping God had come down to a matter of convenience rather than a reverent act.

April 26: 2 Samuel 13-14 and Luke 20:1-26

Nathan proclaimed judgment against David and his family after the Bathsheba incident. Now we see some of that judgment coming around. Amnon, David's son by Ahinoam, is infatuated with Tamar, David's daughter by Maacah. Amnon makes himself sick over her to the point that his friend Jonadab wants to know why the king's son is so upset. Jonadab comes up with a ruse for Amnon to take Tamar by force. He pretends to be sick and requests that she enter his room so that he can eat from her hand. When she enters, he overpowers her and has his way. Immediately after this heinous act, he despises her more than he ever "loved her". Absalom, Tamar's brother, wants to take vengeance, but he must bide his time. He waits two years for the time to be right.

After Amnon has been killed, somehow word makes it to David that all his sons had been killed by Absalom. Jonadab explains that it was only Amnon that was murdered. This does not bring any real relief to David. He mourns the loss of Amnon. Absalom has fled.

Joab sees that David's mind is on Absalom. He devises a plan to get Absalom to come back. He hires a clever woman to pretend be in mourning. The woman approaches David and tells him exactly what Joab told her to. Eventually, he realizes that Joab put the scheme together. Joab is happy to have played a part in it, so he bows down in verse 22 paying homage and praising David. However, Joab's part in this will cost him. Absalom orders that Joab's field be burned. This might seem odd, but Joab had been avoiding Absalom. Absalom knew that if he burned the field, Joab would be forced to come to him. Joab does just that. When he confronts Absalom, he requests an audience with the king. Absalom approaches David and bows down with his face to the ground. David kisses Absalom, signifying that they were reconciled. That reconciliation is only going to last so long, though.

In the New Testament reading the elders and scribes challenge Jesus's authority. Jesus tells them that He will tell them where He gets His authority if they tell Him where John's baptism came from, men or heaven. They don't know how to answer since if they answer it is from heaven, that

will give John credit. However, if they say from man, the people will be upset because the people consider John a prophet.

Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard owner. He leased the land to tenant farmers. He sent servants to check on the vineyard, but when the servants arrived, they were beaten. Finally, the owner sends his son thinking that they will respect him. Instead, the tenant farmers kill the son. The tenant farmers stood for the Israelites. The servants that were beaten represent the Old Testament prophets. They had been sent by God, but were rejected by them. The Son stands for Jesus, who the people will ultimately kill because of the threat He poses to their power.