

Restoration

2 Samuel 18-19

Key Verse: 19:14

“He won over the hearts of the men of Judah so that they were all of one mind. They sent word to the king, ‘Return, you and all your men.’”

How many people here have been broken at some point of your lives? Who has ever felt hopeless and destroyed? When was that? Did everything you cherish disappear or did something you so strongly believe prove to be false? How did you react? Were you lonely and wondering what to do next? Tragedy strikes us all to some degree. Last Sunday, the single deadliest tornado hit Joplin, Missouri and killed at least 139 people with 105 people still missing. Most of the city is gone, cut in half. Think about the survivors and what they are going through: their feelings and thoughts. They lost everything, maybe even including hope. I can't even imagine what they are going through. David must have felt like he lost everything, too. In the last passage, he fled Jerusalem when he thought all the people had gone over to Absalom. The kingdom and the people were essentially stripped from his hands as he overreacted to the news about Absalom. David had heard that his close advisor Ahithophel had gone over to Absalom and he wasn't sure how widespread the revolt was, so he fled. Even though David had so many people with him, he must have felt all alone. I can picture him singing, “I walk this empty street / On the Boulevard of Broken Dreams / Where the city sleeps / And I'm the only one and I walk alone / My shadow's the only one that walks beside me / My shallow heart's the only thing that's beating / Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me / 'Til then I walk alone” (Green Day, *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*, 2004) And yet, David had faith that if it was God's will, he would be restored to his throne in Jerusalem. In his brokenness and loneliness, David trusted that God would take care of all things, and no matter what God did, it would be best. In this passage, we can see David's restoration. The faith that David had in God led him back to Jerusalem and to the Lord.

And it all started with a battle. “David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite.” (18:1-2) David knew that Absalom was coming with an army to find him and destroy him and the people with him, so he took the people with him and created an army of his own and three people over them: Joab, Abishai and Ittai. Now, when the troops were getting ready to head out, David told Joab, Abishai and Ittai not to harm Absalom; he was the king's son. Then, “David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men.” (18:6-7) Twenty thousand men died in the battle, most of them were fighting against David. It was a blow out and Israel was swept in the series and all the Israelite troops fled.

During that time, Absalom had a little encounter. “Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.” (18:9) Absalom was riding along on his mule, going through the woods under a big oak. As he was riding along, his hair, his great pride that was long and luxurious and weighed as much as five pounds, gets caught in the branches of the tree, and the mule keeps going, leaving Absalom hanging in the tree. It sounds like something out of a cartoon. There was Absalom with his feet off the ground swinging in the air with his hair tangled in the tree.

One of David's men saw Absalom hanging in the tree and he went and told Joab. “Joab said to the man who had told him this, ‘What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the

ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt.” (18:11) Joab wanted Absalom dead and even openly offered a reward for Absalom's death, but he was surprised that one of his men didn't feel the same way. “But the man replied, ‘Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, “Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.” And if I had put my life in jeopardy—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me.’” (18:12-13) The man had heard what David said to Joab, Abishai and Ittai about keeping Absalom safe and he did not want to end up on the wrong side of the king. It was a direct command from the king, but Joab didn't care. He was only interested in his own interests, and he wanted the war over and it wouldn't be over until Absalom was dead. Joab wouldn't hear any more of it. He took three javelins and plunged them into Absalom's heart, and then, ten men came and struck and killed Absalom. He died and was buried pitifully in a pit covered with stones. It was an inglorious death for a man filled with pride.

After Absalom's death, Joab sent a message to David that there was victory, but it really wasn't good news. The king's son had died. When word reached David's ears, he was filled with grief and mourned. “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!” (18:33) Even though David had lost nearly everything, he wasn't done with loss. His son was dead. He may have been wicked, but he was still David's son. David loved him and wanted to take Absalom's place. It broke his heart even more to hear that his son was dead. In Absalom's death, David could experience a part of what God would feel a thousand years later, when God's only son died on the cross. As Jesus died, earthquakes wrenched the earth like David's heart was wrenched for Absalom. When Jesus died, the skies darkened for three hours as God mourned for his son. The big difference is that Jesus was sinless and Absalom was a sinner, but the sorrow and loss that David felt allowed him to get closer to a God who would restore him.

The tragedies in our lives give us an opportunity to catch a glimpse of what God goes through. Our sorrows and pain are a shadow of what God feels towards this fallen world. It helps to restore us to God by giving us another way to understand him. My parents and my wife's parents don't believe and we have received flak from both sides at times. My wife's parents think that it is weak to believe and I at one time received an ultimatum to choose between my parents and God. It was so hard to go through these times. We were in tears because of the pain that our own family inflicted on us and it really caused me to be discouraged. However, through those times I could catch a glimpse of God's broken heart for all the fallen people. Every day, people reject God. The Lord's own creation denies his existence. God's children want no part of him. It is a pain that is greater than we can understand, but I got a peek when those close to me pushed me away. The same holds true for each of us, and when we can understand even a small piece of God's heart, then that understanding really does help to restore us to God because he draw closer to him.

David mourned for Absalom, but it was to the point where his men became discouraged. The joy of their victory became shame. Then, Joab, of all people, went and talked to David about the situation. Joab warned him that the men would leave unless he went out to the gate to greet them. David mourned the loss of his son, but he still needed to be the king that the people needed. “So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, ‘The king is sitting in the gateway,’ they all came before him. Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes.” (19:8) David was restored as king in the eyes of his men, but Israel had fled out of fear.

With Absalom's rebellion defeated, it was time for David to return to Jerusalem as king. Unfortunately, none of the tribes had offered to invite David back, not even his own tribe of Judah. The people were talking about bringing David back, but nobody offered. "Throughout the tribes of Israel, all the people were arguing among themselves, saying, 'The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies; he is the one who rescued us from the hand of the Philistines. But now he has fled the country to escape from Absalom; and Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, has died in battle. So why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?'" (19:9-10) The people were in a strange situation. Absalom was the horse they backed. Even if they weren't a part of the conspiracy to overthrow David, when the king left, the people decided to follow Absalom because the king left. However, now, Absalom was dead and the people were wondering about David, but nothing was happening.

Because nobody was doing anything, David had to get things rolling. "King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests: 'Ask the elders of Judah, "Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters? You are my relatives, my own flesh and blood. So why should you be the last to bring back the king?"'" (19:11-12) David reached out to the elders of Judah to have them be the first to call for David's return. Judah was David's home tribe. They should be the first to welcome him back. Yet, the people might wonder if the king would have any hard feelings toward the people because they followed Absalom. To that end, David wanted to appoint Amasa, Absalom's commander, as commander of the army under David, replacing Joab. David harbored no ill will toward Amasa and gave him a high position in his court. This signaled that David was not going to be a vindictive king if he were to return to Jerusalem.

Both of the king's actions were very well received. "He won over the hearts of the men of Judah so that they were all of one mind. They sent word to the king, "Return, you and all your men." (19:14) Absalom stole the hearts of the people, but David's actions won over the hearts of the men of Judah. In the hearts of Judah, David was restored as king and they asked for his return. Here we begin to see David's slow restoration. God is working here, through David and through the people, to bring David back into his position as king. David doesn't have the power to return. He's not sure if the people would take him back. The people don't have the power to restore David. They weren't sure what would happen. Would David get revenge? Nobody knew what was going to happen, but God worked things out to restore David to the throne.

After finally getting an invitation to return, David went as far as the Jordan River. When he reached the river, there was a procession to greet him and bring him over to the other side. "Now the men of Judah had come to Gilgal to go out and meet the king and bring him across the Jordan. Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. With him were a thousand Benjamites, along with Ziba, the steward of Saul's household, and his fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed to the Jordan, where the king was." (19:15-17) Shimei was the man who pelted David and his men with stones while cursing him as David fled Jerusalem. The king didn't want to seek retribution at the time because he thought that God told Shimei to curse him, but when David returned, Shimei was the first to greet David. "When Shimei son of Gera crossed the Jordan, he fell prostrate before the king and said to him, 'May my lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. For I your servant know that I have sinned, but today I have come here as the first from the tribes of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king.'" (19:18-20) Shimei came to David seeking forgiveness for his acts against the king. When he heard that David was returning, he made it a point to be there first to apologize for his actions. David could have sought retribution on this occasion, and Abishai even encouraged it, but David, instead, forgave Shimei. There was

already a lot of death in Israel because of Absalom's treachery. The king didn't want to increase the bloodshed by having Shimei killed and it wouldn't have bided well for the nation. Israel was on the verge of collapse and David wanted to see the nation restored, so he mended the relations between Shimei and himself.

After that, the mending continues, Mephibosheth came to greet David even though he was crippled in both feet. "Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, also went down to meet the king. He had not taken care of his feet or trimmed his mustache or washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he returned safely." (19:24) David had been taking care of Mephibosheth by having him eat at the king's table, but when David fled Jerusalem, he didn't go with him. In fact, Ziba, the steward of Saul's estate said that Mephibosheth was among the conspirators. When David saw Mephibosheth, the king asked him, "Why didn't you go with me?" He replied, "My lord the king, since I your servant am lame, I said, 'I will have my donkey saddled and will ride on it, so I can go with the king.' But Ziba my servant betrayed me. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king. My lord the king is like an angel of God; so do whatever you wish. All my grandfather's descendants deserved nothing but death from my lord the king, but you gave your servant a place among those who eat at your table. So what right do I have to make any more appeals to the king?" (19:26-28) Mephibosheth told David that he was ready to follow David as he left, but Ziba betrayed him by telling lies to David. It kind of looked like it. Mephibosheth hadn't taken care of himself the entire time David was gone. David didn't know who was speaking the truth, so he had the estate divided between the two. Again, David was seeking to restore the relations of the people. David didn't want to see divisions and animosity, so he sought to reconcile the people to each other.

Now, David's restoration to the throne and Israel's restoration are merely prototypes God's full restoration of humanity. In sin, humanity fled from God. When Adam disobeyed the only command given to him by his creator, he began a culture of sin. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned". (Romans 5:12) Because of our continued disobedience, we began to walk further and further away from God: from his light, his warmth, and his guidance. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Romans 1:21) We become broken because we sin. Everything seems futile and our world dark because we are far from our God. In our brokenness, we are lonely because God's presence is not with us and we know it. That Green Day song at the beginning of the message has a line, "Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me / 'Til then I walk alone". Even if we don't know it, when we are separated from God, we yearn to be restored to him. We yearn for someone to find us, so that we won't be broken and alone.

Thank the Lord that someone did find us! "For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (Romans 5:15) Jesus came to find us. At just the right time, Christ died for our sins to bring us healing and to restore us to the image of God we had at the creation of the world (Colossians 3:10). "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) Because of what Jesus did for us, we are able to find peace and be healed. We don't have to be broken. We don't have to be alone and hopeless. We have a God who sought us out and found us. We have a God that did everything possible to restore joy in our hearts and give us eternal life to his glory.

It's amazing that our grief can become joy and we don't have to worry about all the niggling details of life. We don't have to worry about how to provide for ourselves. "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26) We don't have to worry about succeeding in this world because our hope is in God's kingdom and the riches that are there. What a relief, right? Trying to do everything ourselves is like trying to build a straw hut in a hurricane. It is futile. No matter how careful we are, it will eventually get blown away. Instead of having a straw hut in a hurricane, God offers us a mansion in heaven and that is what we are being restored to.

Take a look at your lives. Is it going good? Is it great? Honestly, on your own, you guys suck, every one of you...and me too. I'm the suckiest of all. If you don't think your life sucks, then you are in denial because you do sin and that should really make your life suck. I get frustrated easily and sharp with people and that really makes my life suck. I feel alone and broken when my frustration boils over because I alienate myself. I don't even realize that I am doing it. I'm stabbing myself in the heart and I don't know it. It's no wonder that I feel broken. But I am so thankful for Jesus. He just melts away all the pain and restores me with his love. There is a song that goes, "He is jealous for me / Loves like a hurricane, I am a tree / Bending beneath the weight of his wind and mercy / When all of a sudden / I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by glory / And I realize just how beautiful You are / And how great Your affections are for me / Yeah He loves us / O how He loves us / O how He loves us / O how He loves". (David Crowder Band, *How He Loves*, 2009) When we are restored to God, all of the little things won't matter any more! Don't you just love our God? There is no other god who steps down to lift the people up. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God's heart was so broken, that he stepped into his creation to save him to his glory. That is the greatest restoration that we could ever hope for. So what are you waiting for?