2 Samuel Chapter 15

**Two Kings, Two Ways**

2 Samuel 15:1-37
Key Verse 15:25b

“If I find favor in the Lord’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again.” (15:25b)

The title of my message is “Two Kings, Two Ways”. And key verse is 15:25b. Let’s read together.

**1. Absalom’s Conspiracy**

At the end of the previous chapter, David and Absalom finally met. It’s been five years since they saw each other’s faces. King David kissed his son Absalom. There were complicated emotions between them, but now everything seemed to be resolved.

However, in reality, Absalom was plotting treason behind the back of David. Verse 1-6 shows how Absalom was doing that. Look at verse 1. “In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him.” He bought a Benz S class 650 with a lot of horsepowers. He started cultivating an enticing image of a prominent figure. He understood the importance of image-making. You can imagine a black Cadillac and SUVs with an entourage. **[Picture]** He was already a crown prince. Now to people, he looks like a very powerful figure in politics. Look at verse 2. Absalom would get up early in the morning and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Absalom was very diligent. He worked very hard. From early in the morning, he would meet people. Especially people with a complaint. In those times, people who did not resolve a legal issue in their local court would bring their case to the king. And the king would give a final judgment like a supreme court in our days.

What would Absalom say to the people? He would call out to people and say, “What town are you from?” “Hey, buddy, where are you from?” It’s a personal, kind, and intimate greeting. And they would think, ‘Oh my goodness, the crown prince is calling out to me. Wow, he is really handsome.’ And they answer, “Your servant is from Flushing of Queens”. If they tried to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. He looks very humble and intimate. He was building up an image of the man of the people. On top of that, He was willing to listen to their stories. They have a complaint. They’ve got a lawsuit. They are troubled. Then, the crown prince would listen to their story? How thankful it is. Absalom well understood that, and he took advantage of their vulnerable situations. Look at verse 3. “Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your claims are valid and proper, **but** there is no representative of the king to hear you.” ‘Hey, friend, you are right. You are absolutely true. I am supporting you.’ Look at verse 4. “And Absalom would **add**, “If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice.” By the way, every lawsuit has two parties. In the morning, when he meets one party, he would say, “you’re right. Your claims are valid and proper”. And in an hour, when he meets the other party, what would he say? He would say the exact same thing, “Hey, you’re right. Your claims are valid and proper. I am with you.” Absalom is a genius in politics and psychology. If the first guy won the case, he would think that “Absalom was right. My claim was valid. Who knows? Absalom did something to help me. He is a great guy.” What about the other guy who lost the suit? He would think the same, “Absalom was right. There is no representative of the king to hear me.” And they would repeat the same thing Absalom mentioned. “If only he were appointed judge in the land! Then, I would see that I receive justice.” Absalom was very cunning in winning the hearts of the people. Bible says in verse 6. “Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.” He stole the hearts of the people of Israel.

He did this for four years. Look at verse 7. At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, “Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the Lord. While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: ‘If the Lord takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron.” This is the first and the last time Absalom mentioned “Lord”. Even it doesn’t seem to be genuine. Hebron is a historical place. Their ancestor Abraham and Sarah were buried there. David became a king in Hebron. And Absalom himself was born and raised in Hebron. So he chose Hebron as the place for the coup detat. Verse 9. “The king said to him, “Go in peace.” David let him go without knowing anything.

Now Absalom ran the show quickly. He sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.” This news spread over the country very quickly like CNN breaking news. And Absalom had invited two hundred men from Jerusalem that they accompanied him. They knew nothing about the matter, but to people, it must have appeared that they endorsed the new king Absalom. And Absalom offered sacrifices. It was also to manipulate people. Do people want a spiritual king? No problem, I would play like that. Absalom was handsome, smart, and he looked like loving justice, and he seemed humble, kind, and spiritual. He must have looked like a perfect new king. Look at verse 12. As a final move, Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite. Ahithophel was the most important piece of his plan. Who is Ahithophel? He was David’s counselor. He was not just one of many. 2 Samuel 16:23 states, “Now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel’s advice.” Ahithophel was a greatly wise, insightful, and spiritual counselor. He was outstanding and extraordinary. He was also a close friend of David. In Psalm 55, David wrote that “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God, as we walked about among the worshipers.” (Psalm 55:12-14) So, it doesn’t make any sense for him to join Absalom’s treason. But, Absalom knew that he would join. How could he know that?

Let’s think about Ahithophel a little bit more. Not only him, but also his family line was holding a significant position in David’s kingdom. As I studied about him, I found his family so honorable and respectful. Ahithophel’s family fully dedicated their lives to David for three generations. He himself served David as a counselor, and his son and his grandson-in-law served David as well. 2 Samuel chapter 23 is like a hall of fame in David’s kingdom. There are 37 of David’s mighty warriors. They are all honorable names. There is written Eliam, the son of Ahithophel. And in the very last verse of the chapter, we come to see the familiar name, Uriah the Hittite, who was the husband of Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam. So, Ahithophel is the grandfather of Bathsheba. Ahithophel, Eliam, and Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite. They are all family.

Do you remember what a person told David when David wanted to take Bathsheba? 2 Samuel 11:3 “David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” He’s basically saying “Hey David, she is the daughter of Eliam, one of the most loyal 37 warriors who is fighting for you. David, she is the wife of Uriah, who is also your faithful warrior. Please do nothing to her.” But, sadly, David betrayed them to gratify his sinful desire. And David even murdered Uriah to cover up his sin. It is so heart wrenching.

We can imagine how Ahithophel got bittered. In his mind, David was like Amnon. And David didn’t receive any punishment. Where is justice? If possible, Ahithophel wished to judge David. Absalom knew it. “Ahithophel, come. I know how you feel. David should have died. Let’s do justice!” And it worked. Ahithophel came to Absalom. Later, do you know what is the first advice Ahithophel gave to Absalom? “Sleep with your father’s concubines.” (2 Samuel 16:21a) He would like to pay the shame back to David. What is his second advice? “I would strike down only the king.” (2 Samuel 17:2b) He would like to kill David. It is so heart breaking to see how Ahithophel turned back against David. When Ahithophel joined Absalom, the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom’s following kept on increasing. Now he is ready.

**2. David Flees**

Look at verse 13. A messenger came and told David, “The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.” Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, “Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword.” David’s judgment was exact. He understood what the message really meant, ‘People’s hearts moved over to Absalom. People abandoned David. Now, Absalom took control of the whole army.

So, now King David had to flee. His entire household and all his officials followed him. David left no one behind except ten concubines to take care of the palace. David paused at the edge of the city and watched all the king’s men move past himself. Kerethites, Pelethites, and six hundred Gittites marched before David. Interestingly, they are all foreigners. Even Gittites are people from Gath, which was the hometown of Goliath. When his own son betrayed him, those foreigners remained loyal to him. Among the six hundred Gittites, David noticed Ittai. He joined David very recently. He was an exile from Gath. He must have joined David seeking security and safety. So, David felt sorry for him. And he urged him to go back and stay with king Absalom since it looked much easier and more comfortable way. Look at verse 19-20. “Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. 20 You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your people with you. May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness.”

What is Ittai’s reply? Let’s read together verse 21. “But Ittai replied to the king, “As surely as the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.” ‘Go back and stay with King? Yes, that is exactly what I am doing. I will stay with the king. To me, you are the king. Whether it means life or death, it doesn’t really matter. Wherever you may be, I will be there too.’ How amazing it is! What wonderful faithfulness, loyalty, and love? I believe at that moment, David got a flashback to his great grandmother, Ruth. Ruth was also a foreigner. She was a Moabite. She got married to Kilion, an Israelite. After she joined the family, she only saw tragedies. Her father-in-law died, her brother-in-law died, and her husband also died. There were only three helpless widows left. How tragic! So, when Naomi lost everything and returned to her hometown, she said to her daughters in law, “Go back, each of you, to your mothers’ home. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” (Ruth 1:8-9) ‘I am so sorry for you. I have nothing to give you. Go back to your people and find another husband.’ At this, one of the daughters in law kissed her goodbye and left. But, how about Ruth? Let’s read her response together. “But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” (Ruth 1:16-17) ‘My mother, I didn’t follow you for a blessing. I didn’t follow you to get something. I believe your God is the only true God. Even if God doesn’t bless our life in this world, I will serve him only. God led me to become your daughter, so I will live with you, and I will die with you.’

This beautiful faith and faithfulness run a hundred years and show now in Ittai’s heart. “Wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.” It again runs five hundred years and shows in the heart of Daniel and his friends. When Daniel’s friends were at risk of being thrown into the fire, they replied. Can you please read it? “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. **But even if he does not**, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16-18) ‘even if he does not, we will only serve God alone’ There are always people who pursue their own interests and comforts, and there are always another people who pursue God and truth regardless of the cost. Another five hundred years later, the apostle Paul makes the same confession. “If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (Romans 14:8) This confession is like a spiritual inheritance. It is the touchstone of genuine faith. Jesus also taught his disciples. “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.” (John 12:26) I pray that God gives us the same spirit so that we may follow Jesus wherever he goes, wherever he leads us. Our Heavenly Father will honor those people.

Look at verse 23. “The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.” As David crossed the Kidron Valley, he was greatly pained. It was reflected in Psalm 55. “My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.” (Psalm 55:4-5) Then, Zadok and all the Levites were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices there. Taking the ark of God with him can be very crucial to win back the hearts of people later. But David said to Zadok. Let’s read together verse 25 and 26. “Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.” (2 Samuel 15:25-26) It must be a really tough decision. Zadok and Abiathar probably recalled how David was glad when they brought the ark of God to Jerusalem decades ago. David was dancing before the Lord with all his might while they were bringing the ark of the Lord. (2 Samuel 6:14) But, now David commanded them to take back the ark of God to Jerusalem, not taking it with himself. Absalom’s got people, Absalom’s got an army, Absalom’s got a capital, and now even the ark of God? If David had calculated plus and minus, he could not have done that. But, David set his mind to humble himself before God, and entrust his life with God’s hand. David knew why this happened in his life. It was so painful to admit it but it was the consequence of his own sins. He remembered God’s rebuke through the prophet Nathan “The sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me... Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you.” (2 Samuel 12:10-11) But, David didn’t become resentful or hold a grudge against God. He totally lowered himself and committed his destiny to God. ‘If I find favor in the Lord’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again.’ David knew he was suffering because of his own sin, and he also knew only God’s mercy could save himself. So, David went up to the Mount of Olives weeping with a bare foot with a deeply repentant heart.

Verse 31. David was told “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” David felt deep sorrow. In Psalm 41:9, he poured out his sorrow before God, “Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.” It was also great damage to David since Ahithophel’s wisdom was more powerful than many troops. What David could do was only a prayer. So he prayed, “Lord, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness.” And God answered his prayer. When David arrived at the summit of the Mount, another close friend Hushai the Arkite was waiting for him. He didn’t betray David. He tore his robe and was pained with David. David sent him to Jerusalem to frustrate Ahithophel’s advice. So, Zadok, Abiathar, their two sons, and Hushai returned to Jerusalem to help David.

**3. Two Kings, Two Ways**

When we meditate on today’s chapter, we see two different spiritual streams. One is self-righteousness, pride, and judgment. The other is humility, faithfulness, mercy, and grace. This is a huge spiritual warfare throughout history. Absalom and Ahithophel belong to the former, and David, Ittai, Zadok, Husahi, and others belong to the latter.

Absalom had a perfectly handsome appearance. Bible describes “From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him.” (2 Samuel 14:25) He was smart and he also had a strong sense of justice. But he became proud and corrupted and tried to overthrow the throne of the King, which is exactly the same route Satan took when he was an angel. Looking into Absalom’s mind, we notice a specific theme that plays an essential role inside him. It is “justice”. He defended his murder of Amnon, believing he did justice. In the previous chapter, Absalom said to Joab, “If I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death.” (2 Samuel 14:32b) He never felt guilty of his murder. Also, Absalom promoted discontent among people by saying “If only I were appointed judge, then I would see that they receive justice.” (2 Samuel 15:4) In Absalom’s mind, David didn’t serve justice. When Amnon violated his sister Tamar, David did nothing. When he did something to Amnon, David banished him and kept him at a distance. To Absalom, he himself was right, but David was unjust.

Ahithophel was brilliant. But he became bitter. Later, he killed himself with bitterness. He could not forgive David. He wanted to get revenge on David. He could not understand God, who forgave David.

They must have thought they themselves were righteous. So, they judged, condemned, and punished. If God forgave David, they couldn’t accept God either. In Jesus’ time, Pharisees and Sadducees were the same. They were against Jesus with their self-righteousness. Their behaviors seemed right to themselves. But, God says, “A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart.” (Proverbs 21:2) They thought they could clearly see, but Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” (John 9:41)

David knew he was a sinner. He already did know it before, but now he is more realizing as he lives. He committed a horrible sin he himself couldn’t understand. He doesn’t trust himself anymore. He is not an object to rely on any longer. Now, he only lives by God’s grace. He only entrusts himself to his mercy. He truly realizes only God is the foundation of his salvation. He only takes hold of his love and grace. During his flee, he confessed again “Have mercy on me, Lord; heal me, for I have sinned against you.” (Psalm 41:4) God’s mercy is the only hope. There is nothing else.

To this David, God displays his grace through his faithful people like Ittai. Ittai’s reply sounds like God’s promise. ‘I will never leave you, I will never forsake you’ (Hebrews 13:5b) ‘Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:20b) It’s like Jesus who loved his people to the end. Jesus says, let’s read this together. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means; ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12)

David and his people including Zadok, Abiathar, Ittai, and Hushai, they appreciate God’s grace and mercy. They understand the ark of covenant is covered by “mercy seat”, the atonement cover. **[Picture]** Before God’s holy words, we cannot be righteous. But, by his redemptive love, we become righteous. Interestingly, in Chinese character, the righteousness is the combination of lamb and me. The Lamb over me is righteousness. Whenever God looks down at us, this is what he sees. The perfect Lamb of God covering me. The God David met at his lowest point was the God who loved him when he was still sinner. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” The God he encountered was the God who loved him first. 1 John 4:10 and 19 says, “This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” “We love because he first loved us.” The God David met was the God who remembers mercy even in wrath. (Habakkuk 3:2b)

I praise this wonderful God for his amazing mercy and grace. Only may God be exalted and praised forever. I pray that we may not become self-righteous but live our lives only depending on God’s grace and love through Jesus Christ. Amen.