**How will you meet the king?**

(King David’s return to Jerusalem)

2 Samuel 19:9-43

Key verse: The king kissed Barzillai and gave him his blessing, and Barzillai returned to his home (19:39b)

Today’s passage is about King David’s return to Jerusalem after a forced exile caused by his son Absalom. In today’s passage, we are presented with 4 different people and two groups of people who met the king. Each one meets him with a different attitude.

 Before we start, let me ask your opinion. Before Absalom’s rebellion, David was the king over Israel, right? Then after Absalom’s rebellion, who was the rightful king over Israel? David or Absalom? Now, Absalom was dead. Then who is the king over Israel? Understanding these questions will help us to understand the atmosphere of today’s passage.

We can have two different opinions for this question depending on the “point of view.”  To the Israelites' point of view, Absalom was the king over Israel, because all tribes of Israelites, including the tribe of Judah, chose Absalom as their king. ***Chapter 15: 13b reads, “the hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.”*** People liked Absalom to be their king because Absalom seemed to take care of their needs better than King David. Now, when Absalom was dead, they had no king over them.

However, from God's point of view, Absalom has never been a king over Israel. The nation Israel was God’s nation, His chosen people. Therefore, no one simply makes himself the king of Israel. The king was anointed by God.

In this age of democracy, people choose their own king or leader to follow to fit their own preference. However, in God, if we acknowledge ourselves as God’s people, we have only one anointed king to serve and follow, who is Jesus Christ our Lord. People during the time of the early church, gave up their lives to stick to this confession of faith.

In reality, the Israelites had no choice but to bring David back again as their king. But the situation was very complicated, because they had fought against King David on Absalom’s side. They had already become the enemy of King David. They knew that there would be a punishment when King David returned. Some of the elders of the tribes must be executed. They were stuck in a dilemma.

1. **Driven by politics (19:8b-15, 41-43)**

So, notice in verse 9 the word “arguing” or “quarreling” in another version. Some people started remembering what King David had done for them, saying **“The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies, especially from the Philistines.”**  But most people still were not happy to see king David. They wanted someone to do something, pointing fingers at each other.

Look at verse 19:11. ***“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?’”***

King David also must figure out how to put the pieces back together and return to his throne in Jerusalem. He had two options. As a person, he could seek personal revenge by eliminating all his political opponents.

However, he took action as King. ***“Do I not know that today I am king over Israel?” (19:22b)*** As king, he chose to forgive everyone. Look at verses 9:12, 13, ***“You are my brothers, my own flesh and blood. So why should you be the last to bring back the king? And say to Amasa, ‘Are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if from now on you are not the commander of my army in place of Joab?”***

Absalom’s conspiracy started in Hebron, a city in Judah. Amasa from Judah was Absalom’s military general as being Absalom’s cousin and one of David’s nephews. People in Judah may have been afraid of what David might do to them. However, David announced a perfect forgiveness. He even swears that Amasa will remain the new royal general on behalf of Joab. This is good news of great joy for them. Nothing will be asked and there will be no punishment for their treason. People in Judah could be released from all kinds of anxiety and stress. They must have been very thankful to the King. This was a great chance for them to establish a new relationship with the king as a forgiven sinner and for restoration of their faithfulness and trust.

What was their response? Let’s read verse 14. ***“He won over the hearts of all the men in Judah as though they were one man. They sent word to the king, “Return, you and all your men.””*** It seems like a happy ending. However, what happened next? Look at verse 40. ***“When the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham crossed with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel had taken the king over.*** Why did only half of the troops of Israel welcome King David?

Verse 41 explains the reason. ***“Soon all the men of Israel were coming to the king and saying to him, “why did our brothers, the men of Judah, steal the king away and bring him and his household across the Jordan, together with all his men?”*** Welcoming the King should be a national event. Therefore, representatives of all the tribes of Israel should be present together. However, the tribe of Judah didn’t do that. When they received the words from the king, especially when David mentioned ***“you are my own flesh and blood”,*** they felt they were special. They deliberately excluded the rest of the tribes.

So, all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel. ***“We did this because the king is closely related to us.”*** (V42) “Why are you angry about it?” What’s wrong with you, guys! ***Then the men of Israel answered the men of Judah. “We have ten shares in the king. Why do you treat us with contempt? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?”*** (V43)

We notice here that there was a serious power struggle among the tribes. Especially between Judah and Ephraim who was the leader of the rest of the 10 tribes. We can see the motivation of them welcoming the King.  What is the basic motivation of Israel and Judah in welcoming David? They are driven by politics. They are driven by the desire to advance their own agendas through a good standing with the king. There is no indication that they are remorseful about their treason. No one reaches out to David in humility, confessing their sins of treason. They were not serving their king although they outwardly welcomed their king with pomp and ceremony. They were seeking their own political ambitions and pride. They are driven by a desire to secure influence and favors and power. Their focus was on themselves, not the king.

This story reminds us to think about our motivation for serving our king Jesus. Jesus is a perfect king to us. Isaiah introduced this king in Isa 9:6,7, ***“ He is wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace. He will reign over his kingdom with justice and righteousness.”*** Jesus lost everything for us on the cross, his dignity as the Son of God, body, last drop of his blood. He even lost last piece of his garment. (Pastor 임현석 story) Jesus took our place and the punishment we deserve. Jesus offers us full and forever forgiveness in God’s presence. We know that there are thousands of reasons that we offer all our hearts, affection, and trust to our Lord Jesus. However, just receiving or acknowledging all these blessings doesn’t mean that we are serving the Lord Jesus.  Just attending the worship service here doesn’t mean that we are serving Jesus, our Lord.

As the Israelites didn’t truly serve the king because of their wrong motives, we also think that we are serving Jesus, but are not at all, due to our wrong motives. The Israelites should serve King David because he was the rightful king, a merciful king, not because they can satisfy their own needs from the king. Their focus should be on **the king himself**, **not on themselves**. In the same way, our focus should be on Jesus, not my agendas. The early Christians followed Jesus because **“Jesus is the Lord.”** That’s the primary reason to follow Him. That is the reason that they could endure hundreds of years of life in the Catacombs under Roman persecution.

In the very first chapter of the book titled “The Purpose Driven Life”, pastor Rick Warren proclaims that “**Life is not about me, it is all about God.”** If our Christian life is focused on me, myself, and I, we will **be rejected by God** at the end of our life. Let me share one example. The love and forgiveness we find in the cross of Christ would bring opposite results depending on our focus.

Jesus explained this in **“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.” (Mt 18:21-35)** One servant owed the king ten thousand talents. ($22 billion in today’s currency) The servant begged on his knees before the king. The king took pity on him and canceled the debt., that servant met another servant who owed him a hundred denarii. (around $30,000 ) However, he didn’t show mercy to that servant. He put the servant into prison until he could pay the debt. When the king heard this, in anger, he turned the wicked servant **to the jailers to be tortured** until he should pay back all he owed.

We need to seriously pay attention to the phrase, **“God turned the wicked servant to the jailers to be tortured.”** Can we count this servant as a Christian? Yes, we will call him as a Christian because he received forgiveness of sins. But Jesus said that “he was rejected by God.” Jesus declared clearly in **Mt. 6:15, “But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.** (No salvation)

Jesus teaches us that we should focus on the merciful king in this parable. When the servant focused on the merciful king and **meditated on his mercy, he would be able to forgive the other servant.** However, he focused on himself, only his needs. Many Christians in the church confess the grace and forgiveness of God in their prayers and singing. But so many Christians don't forgive even small sins of others **when their pride was hurt or due to their judging spirit**.  Our different motives drive us to a “playdough” Jesus, one who can be molded to meet our felt needs, not our true need. I know the song saying, “Jesus is on my side.” I personally believe that this phrase might bring an incorrect interpretation. **Jesus is on the side of truth and righteousness.**

1. **Driven by a genuine heart (19:24-40)**

However, we could find other examples of those who served the king with pure hearts without greed or human ambition. Their stories are so beautiful, like the stories about Barzillai and Mephibosheth. The biblical writer devotes more space to Barzillai than to the other people whom David encountered on his way back to Jerusalem. To make complete sense of this, we need to remember what the writer told us in chapter 17:27-29. ***Barzillai brought bedding, bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows’ milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, “The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert***.

We need to notice why the writer wrote about all the items he brought in detail. (story telling: Like not just cheese, but cheese from cows’ milk; last Tuesday lunch at the church; Kimchi roasted with oil, lentil power rice cake, fruit, golden kiwi. Etc) It is because God recognized his thoughtful and caring pure heart. **God doesn’t miss any of the small details if they are done with a pure heart and motivation**. In the opposite, if our motive is not pure, God will not value our labor.

His heart is so precious before God. Barzillai, without being asked, provided for David and his people because they were in desperate need. And as we see here from 19:31-40, Barzillai was not motivated by some hope of reward from David. It did not matter whether Absalom succeeded or failed. He did what was right before God. It appears that Barzillai helped David simply because he was God’s anointed king. He was not driven by politics. It was his pleasure serving the king.

As they talked, David wished to show his gratitude to him by bringing him to Jerusalem. However, he politely refused, saying that he was too old to enjoy all the benefits David would offer. But that is not the case. People’s ambition and greed don’t disappear with age. President Joe Biden's age is 80. But he wants to run for the presidency again next time. Although Barzillai was a very rich man, he was not gripped by wealth. Although he was very old, he didn’t become stubborn by age. His heart was soft, humble, generous, and full of wisdom. I can smell the fragrance of his life. You know the difference between an artificial flower and a real flower. If our hearts become pure and clean, we will produce the fragrance of Christ. However, selfish ambition and greed in our hearts will produce a stinky smell.

 I wish I would become like him as I get older. Later, David instructed Solomon to continue to be kind to Barzillai’s sons. David was also faithful to him as Barzillai was faithful to David. I pray that there may be faithfulness to God in us.

Mephibosheth was misunderstood by King David. Mephibosheth explained what happened to him. According to his narration, he was betrayed by his servant Ziba. There was no proof at that time and no time to investigate whether he was truthful or not. However, the Bible writer recorded his good intention by saying, ***“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.”*** (V24) However, David was not fully convinced by his explanation. So, he ordered to divide his wealth with his servant Ziba. However, he said to David, ***“Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has arrived home safely.”*** His first concern was David himself, his safety and wellbeing. Here we can see the common point between Mephibosheth and Barzillai. Both focused on the relationship with King David, not the benefits he could offer.

This is the lifelong principle that most Christians have to struggle to learn. “***Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.***” (Mt 6:33) We all struggle to get “all these things” in our daily lives–material things, human recognition, achievements. However, those are not God’s ultimate interest. How can we seek his righteousness? I think that it is not about doing a specific thing. Seeking his righteousness means whatever we do, we do it with the right motive, which is doing something in a way that pleases God. If God is pleased, we do it even if we suffer loss. If God is not pleased, we don’t do it although it would have been beneficial to us.

Someone said, when we get to heaven, God will ask us questions. These are the possibilities: What is your relationship with my Son Jesus? Did you really serve him as your king or by lips? Did you trust him or your ability? Did you honor him in front of people or take honor for yourself?

One missionary went to heaven while he was in a coma for 20 days due to a car accident. (Actual testimony from missionary in Mexico) In heaven, he met Jesus and Jesus began to evaluate his life to give him rewards. He expected to get a lot of credit because he endured hardships doing many evangelical activities. However, Jesus didn’t give him much credit for his labor, so he asked, “why not Lord.” Jesus said it is because your motive was not pure, you did many things to get people’s recognition.

1. **Shimei’s repentance and David’s forgiveness. (19:16-23)**

Now we are going back to verses 16 – 23. We remember that Shimei harassed David when David fled from Absalom in chapter 16. He hurled rocks, dirt and insulted David. Abishai had wanted to cut his head off. But David refused, assuming God was rebuking him through his loud mouth. Now on his return, David must pass through Bahurim, Shimei’s hometown. Shimei knows he is in serious trouble. Shemei came, apparently convicted of his folly and sin and eager to demonstrate his repentance to David as he seeks forgiveness. He brings 1,000 Benjamites with him, who also express their submission to David as their king. Shimei does not beat around the bush. He confesses his sin and pleads for David’s forgiveness. Once again, Abishai expresses his wish to execute this troublemaker. David refuses Abishai once again, rebuking not only him but his brother Joab. David announced the forgiveness of his sin, saying ”you shall not die.” He decided as king to seek the reconciliation of the nation, instead of seeking his personal revenge.

Here, one question arises. Is his repentance sincere or fake? It seems that he just tried to avoid punishment by using the current situation. Verse 17 recorded that he brought 1,000 Benjamites with him along with Ziba. This tells us that Shimei is not an ordinary person. He is an influencer among the Benjamites who can mobilize 1,000 men instantly to be with him. Ziba was also the servant of King Saul’s household who controlled all the wealth of King Saul. If king David refused to forgive him, that meant he would not forgive all the Benjamites who gathered. So David wouldn’t have any other choice. His repentance was polluted with politics. Look at verse 20b. ***“But today I have come here as the first of the whole house of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king.”*** Here, he is bragging about his actions. He spoke about his contribution to David’s return as the one who welcomed him first, and therefore influencing other tribes.

True repentance is to admit one’s fault and pay the price for his wrongdoing. The moment we think that “I am worthy to be forgiven”, our repentance loses its validity. David was forgiven by God for his sin, but he was under God’s discipline, accompanied by many sufferings. Repentance, not accompanied by change, is not true repentance. David didn’t kill Shimei, but he also was not forgiven. Later David gave word to Solomon. ***“And remember, you have with you Shimei… who called down bitter curse on me… But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.” (I king:8,9)***

**In Conclusion**

David’s difficulties served to humble David, and to make him more dependent upon God. These painful episodes in David’s life produced a humility and graciousness in him that were not evident earlier in his life. He graciously forgave all Israelites as he had experienced forgiveness from God for his own sin. David learned to receive, as well as to give, as we see in his faithful friend Barzillai.

When the king returns, will we be found faithful? When Jesus comes again as king, where do you want to find yourself–among the people of Judah, the rest of the Israelites, as a Shimei, Ziba, Mephibosheth, or Barzillai?