April 1-2, 2017

# Leading in a Divided Kingdom

*Courage to Lead Series*

**2 Samuel 19:1-43**

Pastor Bryan Clark

I think it would be accurate to say, I don't believe in my lifetime I've ever seen our nation so deeply divided. I understand that politics are politics. There's always been name calling and politicking and all that stuff. But this seems different. This has bled far out of Washington, D.C. This is now dividing communities; it's dividing businesses; it's dividing churches; it's dividing families. This is not inconsequential—it is devastating people's lives. Something is different. Another way of thinking about it is probably almost everyone here this morning has some genuine area of concern or passion about something that needs to be addressed or changed. But the reality is: unless something significant changes, there is virtually no chance of that area of concern being changed in any significant way. So we're left with the question: What do we do? The question is not: what should *they* do? The question is: what should *we* do? And perhaps we can learn something from a king in Israel three thousand years ago.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 19. If you're visiting with us this morning, we've been working our way through 1 and 2 Samuel, and in chapter 18, Absalom has been leading a revolt against his father David, the king. Last week there was the long awaited civil war; 20,000 people died, but Absalom is soundly defeated, and Absalom himself is put to death. David is broken as a father over the death of his son, and seems just absolutely inconsolable. Now the way we're going to do this, this morning, I don't really like, but there are forty-three verses. I have limited time because of the baptisms, so I'm just going to talk my way through it. There just simply isn't time to read the text; you will have to do that on your own, at your leisure. I'll just kind of walk you through it. The story line is fairly clear; the application, not so much.

So we pick it up in chapter 19, starting at verse one. Verses one through eight, David is broken and devastated over the death of his son Absalom, who was leading this revolt. David's soldiers are now coming back to Mahanaim where he has found refuge as kind of his staging point. And rather than them returning as glorious victors, they actually are coming to the gate with more of a sense of humiliation and shame. So Joab talks to David and says to David, *"These are the men who risked their lives to save your life. They risked their lives to save your family, and they've made it possible for you to return to Jerusalem to be the king. You should be celebrating what these people have done for you! But instead, they are returning with a sense of humiliation and shame because of your behavior.* Joab goes so far as to say, *"You seem to love those who hate you, and you seem to hate those who love you!* He even goes so far as to say, *"We get the feeling that if all of us were dead—those who have just given everything for you—but Absalom was alive, you'd be as happy as you could be.*

The key word that's repeated again and again—it's repeated five times in two verses—is the word *today*. Basically what Joab is saying is, "Whatever has happened in the past, whatever regrets, whatever sin, whatever things you wish you could do differently, it's in the past. You can't change it, but you're still the king, and you need to step up and be the king today." Basically what Joab tells David is, "If you don't step up today and do something," —I think he meant literally *today*— "tonight the soldiers are walking, and you'll be left all alone." And in essence, what he says is, "Whatever in your past has been difficult, it will be nothing compared to the nightmare in your

future, unless you step up right now and be king." So David at least goes down to the gates. It's kind of lame, but it's something.

And then the story turns in the last part of verse eight and on to this grand mission that David now has to unite the nation together. Remember, Israel is the North which is basically eleven tribes in the north. Judah is the South, and primarily the one tribe in the south. So Israel is deciding, "What do we do now?" Many of them had gone with Absalom. They had anointed Absalom their new king, but now Absalom is dead. So what do they do? They discuss among themselves and they remind themselves that, "When David was king, he delivered us from our enemies. He set us free from the Philistines. When we anointed Absalom, David defeated Absalom. So the most logical thing is: let's bring him back and make him king." So Israel—the eleven tribes to the north—agree to that. David then moves his attention to Judah in the south. He talks to Abiathar and Zadok the priests, and basically asks the question, *"Why is Judah dragging its feet to invite me back to be king?"* Much of Judah had gone with Absalom. Judah was also David's blood relatives, so David is saying, *"You're my family; you're my blood relatives. Why do you not invite me to be king like everyone else?"*

I think it's entirely possible that Judah was concerned because they had gone with Absalom, that if David regains power, he might punish all of them. That would be a legitimate concern. Whatever it is, David makes a significant leadership move. He takes Amasa—so this gets confusing. Amasa, Joab, and Abishai are cousins. Abishai and Joab are brothers; their cousin is Amasa, and they are all nephews to David. So when Absalom led his rebellion, Amasa was in charge of the troops. Now Absalom is dead and David promises to put Amasa over the troops of Israel as commander, and demotes Joab. Now there are probably a couple of reasons for that. By this point in the story there's no question David would have known that Joab was the leader in putting his son to death even though David said he didn't want that. So this may be David's way of demoting Joab to punish him. There's been a long tension between these two and David's maybe just tired of it, and he demotes him. But it's also possible that part of this is just a savvy political move—I'd say a good leadership move. Israel, Judah, they're all afraid. What's David going to do? So if he takes Amasa, puts him over the troops, it's an act of good will to say, "I have no intent to punish those who were with Absalom; we just need to come back together and be one nation again. What it says in verse 14 is:

> **Thus he turned the hearts of all the men of Judah as one man...** (*NASB, 2 Samuel 19:14a)

What we don't know: is the **he** referring to Amasa or is the **he** referring to David? It could be saying, because of David's leadership move, all the nation turned back to him. It could also be saying that Amasa, as a result of this, led his people back to David. Anyway, the effect is very positive. So now you have thousands that are going to go down to where David's going to cross the Jordan and basically create an escort, kind of a parade—a celebration twenty miles back to Jerusalem to reinstall David as king.

So you remember David crossed the Jordan. He's on the east side and then north to Mahanaim. So he's got to come down the Jordan; he's going to cross at Gilgal; they're going to gather by the thousands at Gilgal. It's about a twenty-mile march, basically retracing his steps that he took in the exile. If you remember when David left in the exile, the text recorded a number of personal encounters. So now he's retracing those steps and again we have those personal encounters with basically the exact same people. It's just kind of working its way backwards. So we know in verse sixteen that the first one is Shimei. We also know that Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, is somewhere in the crowd.

Now if you remember, Shimei was the one in Baharaim who, when David came through, was up on the rocks throwing dirt on David. He was cursing David. He was falsely accusing David, was throwing rocks at David, and Abishai said, *"Let me go up there and cut off his head."* But David said, *"No,"* because in the words of Shimei, "David still heard the voice of God."

So imagine you're Shimei. Absalom is dead; David's coming back to be reinstalled as the king. After what you did and said, you're thinking, "I am in so much trouble." It is also highly likely that the people of Bahurim said, "You need to go out there and talk to him, or he's going to kill all of us." And so Shimei steps forward and says, "*Hi, I'm Shimei. You remember me. I threw things at you and yelled curses."* But then what he says is, "*I was totally wrong. I have sinned before the king, and I'm asking the king for mercy."*

In typical fashion, Abishai steps up and says, *"Let's kill this guy*." Abishai kind of had a quick temper, seemed to always want to kill someone. So he and Joab would be brothers and they seemed to always want to fight—and that's exactly what David says. "*What is the problem with you two sons of Zeruiah? You just always want to start fights!"* So David declares there will be no fight today. He's not going to kill Shimei. He has mercy on him and he moves on. One can only imagine the level of conflict and fear that would have caused, had David allowed Abishai to kill him. David has a grand mission, and the mission is to pull the nation back together as one again—and killing Shimei would not favor that.

The next one starting in verse 24, is Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is the son of Jonathan, so the grandson of Saul, and he was crippled. You remember the story when David left in exile and was going up over the Mount of Olives, that the servant of Mephibosheth caught up to David, and he had donkeys full of food and provisions for David and his family. David asked what about Mephibosheth and he was told that Mephibosheth, Jonathan's crippled son whom David had shown so much kindness and compassion to and had actually made him part of his family, had betrayed him—stayed in Jerusalem, and believed he could seize the moment to put the family of Saul back on the throne.

So now Mephibosheth shows up and he has all the physical trappings of someone in mourning. His beard has grown out; his toenails have grown out; his clothing stinks. All of that would reflect someone who is just simply in mourning. Now one of the points in the text is: you can't fake that. You can't suddenly grow a beard and suddenly grow toenails. So the evidence would be he truly has been in mourning over time. So he meets up with David, and David asks the logical question: "*Why did you not leave Jerusalem with us when we left in exile?"* Mephibosheth said, "*I wanted to, but you do know I'm crippled. I asked Ziba to go down, saddle the donkeys and we would go with, but Ziba went down, saddled the donkeys, and disappeared. He never came back." So then he took all these provisions to David and made up the story about Mephibosheth betraying David. Mephibosheth says, "I didn't do that. I wanted to go, but Ziba tricked me and he lied to you."* So now David's kind of stuck in this place where he doesn't know who is telling the truth. That kind of reminds me of when a husband and a wife both come to see me. One has one story; one has another story, and you're left trying to figure out who is telling the truth here. David has neither the interest nor the energy to try to figure this out. David has this grand mission that he's on to unite the nation, and he simply has no energy to be sidetracked by this little squabble between Mephibosheth and Ziba. So basically he divides the property in half, and he moves on his way.

The third encounter is Barzillai, starting in verse thirty-one. Now I'm sure all of you know who Barzillai is, but just in case you forgot, I'll remind you. When David was fleeing with his people for his life, they were tired; they were hungry; they were hanging by a thread. They had made it

across the Jordan; they had made it up to Mahanaim, and there were three men, significant men, who met them and offered them refuge, offered them food, offered them care—gave them what they needed to regain their strength and ultimately win the battle.

Barzillai was one of the three men, a Giliadite. So David wants to reward his loyalty. He says to him, "*You know, I want you to come back with me and I'll give you everything you ever could have imagined, just like you're part of my family*." But Barzillai says, "You know, I'm old; I'm tired. I just want to go home and die. But I think my son would like to go." So David offers the same to his son, and his son goes with him.

We get then to verse forty. Basically, verse forty to the end of the chapter looks a lot like 21st century American politics. You have kind of this petty fighting between Israel and Judah. Basically the question is: who gets the more prominent position in the parade back to Jerusalem? So Israel steps up and says, *"We don't understand why Judah's taking such a prominent role. We decided to bring David back as king first, so we think we should have the more prominent role."* Judah answers back, *"Well, actually we're kin! We're blood; we're family, so we should have the more prominent role."* Israel responds back, *"But there are eleven of us and only one of you (referring to tribes); therefore we should have the place of honor, not you!"* The paragraph ends with the very clear statement that the nation is deeply divided, and you get the feeling something dramatic is about to happen. And something dramatic does happen, and we'll find out next week. *(laughter)* Exactly!

So, for this week, what's happening in this passage? What's happening is once David gets back on his feet, gets his wits about him and realizes he's still king and there are the lives of thousands of people at risk, expecting him to do his job, he needs to step up and be king. And so his grand mission is to somehow reunite the nation together as one nation under God. So he begins this process, making careful skillful leadership moves.

So he moves Amasa to head up the troops to win the favor of the people of Judah and probably to demote Joab—an act of good faith that the people believe, and they begin to come together. When he gets to Shimei, he's not going to engage in some personal agenda to get even with this guy that yelled at him. Even though that might be tempting, one can only imagine the damage that would have created—additional, unnecessary conflict. So in a wise leadership move, he grants him mercy and forgiveness. He's got two brothers, determined to start a fight at every move—Abishai and Joab—and once again, David stops them and rebukes them and says, *"What is wrong with you two? You just always want to start fights."* And David distances himself from them.

You run into Mephibosheth and Ziba and this is: are they for us or against us? There are two different stories. David has neither the time nor the energy to get sidetracked by this little domestic dispute, and so he divides the land as he's got a bigger, grander mission to attend to. And then ultimately, with Barzillai he just wants to reward his faithfulness and loyalty to the mission. It's clear at the end of the story the nation is deeply divided, and David has a lot of work to do.

So what is the relevance to us? No question, there are dramatic differences between Old Testament Israel and modern day America—lots of differences! Israel was a theocracy, meaning God was the King; David was the human king. They were run by a monarch. We have a representative democracy. It's a very different government. In a monarchy, that can be good or bad. If the king is good, the king just says, "We're going to follow God." There's not an argument, and he takes the nation that way. If the king is bad, it's rather disastrous because there are no checks and balances, and he just does bad things and lots of people get hurt.

We are in a representative democracy. It's a bit of a historical experiment, and only time will demonstrate how this ultimately plays out. There's been a lot of favor and good in our system over the years. But here's the problem: When our nation's leaders lose sight of the grand mission, it turns into gridlock, and nothing really happens. This is not inconsequential. While those who have been called to be leaders, many of them acting more like children, we end up with gridlock that seems like it has no real solution at the top, while real people with real lives are suffering in the streets. And this is a concern that most people have. I doubt there's anyone in the room that would say, "Looks like it's all working really well right now." So it leaves you with the sense of: what needs to happen for this to really change? Well, I want to offer a suggestion. Is it possible that the answers to the concerns that matter most to us are not found in Washington, D.C.? Is it possible that the solution is not in Washington? Is it possible that that's not where our help comes from, but we need to realize our help comes from somewhere else?

Is there anybody in the room that thinks we can solve the nation's problems with more laws, with more policies, with more taxing? Is that going to solve the problems that matter most to you? In the Bible, that would be referred to as legalism. It is the idea that on the basis of laws and external pressures, somehow it can change the human heart for good. Yet when we read our Bibles, it is clear. The law has no ability to change the human heart. The answers are not in Washington—never have been, never will be. Is there anybody in the room this morning that honestly thinks that the people in Washington can pass a law that will cause a white man, a black man, a Middle Eastern man and a Hispanic man to genuinely love and trust one another? Is there anybody that thinks we can pass a law that forces someone to love your neighbor as yourself? Is there anyone that thinks that somehow, out of Washington, we can make people become what the Bible calls the righteous... those who are willing to, at times disadvantage themselves in order to advantage the greater community?

And we would all say, "NO!" The only way that's going to happen is if there is a radical encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. Only Jesus has the power to radically transform a human heart and genuinely, authentically, bring lasting change. The grand mission is to understand that the answer is not in government; it's not in Washington. It never has been. The answer lies in the Church, and the Church's responsibility to be a steward of the life-changing gospel of Jesus. Before we get too critical about everybody in Washington, let's remind ourselves that God has called us to be the stewards of the gospel, to bring forth the message of the crucified and resurrected Christ in order to bring about true and lasting change. Now I'm going to guess if you interviewed every Christian in the room, no one would disagree with that. We know the ultimate answers don't come out of Washington. But I would suggest to you, we *don't* know that. We must not. If we really understood that, and believed it, why are we so obsessed with Washington? Why are we so obsessed with politics? Why is there so much anger? Why is there so much fear? Why do we spend so much time investing ourselves in that which ultimately can't bring about the lasting solution? At the end of the day, it would seem to me we must think that's where help comes from, or we just wouldn't dwell on it every single day.

Why so much anger and strong opinions in social media, if we don't think that's where the solution comes from? You have Christians that are determined to put up angry posts, take a couple of verses from the Bible, pull them out of context and, "See, God's on our side!" Most of these issues are far more complicated than that. I am absolutely convinced if Christians were as passionate about the gospel as they are about politics, we would see real and lasting changes in our community. At some point we have to stop and ask ourselves, "Where does the answer come from?" That is the grand mission, and we can't get sidetracked on that which ultimately won't bring about lasting change.

Just like David, we have daily opportunities to get distracted. We run into people like Shimei, who are determined to throw dirt, throw stones, to curse, to accuse us of all kinds of things that aren't true. The fight is always there if we want it. But we need to have the discipline and the skill of David to say, "I have a grander mission, and I choose not to engage in that, because there is a bigger mission, and that has to be my focus." Sadly, there are always people like Joab and Abishai that are out there, that always seem to want to start a fight. It seems like they don't know who they are if they aren't involved in some level of conflict. To be perfectly honest with you, I do not want those people on my team. There's enough of that in the culture, and it's a major distraction from the grand vision, and makes it so much more difficult to have meaningful conversations with people about Jesus when you got hot heads who just can't stop causing conflict. You have people like Ziba and Mephibosheth, who you can't figure out who is telling the truth, whose side are they on? At some point you realize, "I don't have the time or the energy to figure all this out. I'm not going to get sidetracked with this. I have a bigger, grander mission—an assignment God has given me," and certainly to understand those who are loyal and faithful are to be rewarded for their faithfulness.

We have to understand that the ultimate reconciliation is this unimaginable, miraculous reconciliation—that God would make it possible for sinful men and women—sinners, misfits and losers—to be made right in the presence of a holy God forever. That is a reconciliation that was absolutely, virtually impossible apart from the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is a miraculous reconciliation—and it is the beginning step of any true reconciliation among people!

This morning we celebrate reconciliation through baptism. My prayer is that with every baptism that we witness this morning, we are reminded that this represents a miraculous reconciliation—that somehow a sinner could be reconciled to a holy God—now and forever, based on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. And with every baptism we are reminded: this is the mission; this is the assignment. It's a grand mission! Anything...anything that we say or do that puts any kind of a barrier in the way of accomplishing the grand mission is a strategic error and a step backwards. At the end of the day, the only way there's going to be true and lasting change among us is if there is first a miraculous reconciliation between sinful people and a holy God, made possible by Jesus. It's only when people are truly reconciled to God that they have taken the first meaningful step in true reconciliation among people.

*Our Father, we celebrate this morning that You are the God of miraculous reconciliation. God, at the end of the day, the answer does not come from Washington. The answer is in the Church's responsibility to be stewards of the life-changing gospel of Jesus. God, help us to be faithful to do our job. God, this morning we witness and we celebrate that sinners and misfits and losers have been radically made right in the presence of a holy God, now and forever through the shed blood of Jesus. God, help us to remember, this is the grand mission that You have given us to accomplish. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## Opening Discussion

1. How would you assess the state of American politics right now and how do you see this affecting local communities, businesses, families and churches?

2. What are some of your biggest concerns in our world today and how effective do you think our leaders in Washington D.C. will be to address that concern? What does that tell you? Where does the answer lie?

## Bible Study

1. Read II Samuel 19:1-8. Imagine you are one of David's soldiers. How would you feel if he was acting this way? David is understandably broken with grief but he's still the king and has a job to do. What might be the cost if David fails to fulfill his responsibility as king?

2. Why do you think Joab repeated the word "today" 5 times in two verses (5, 6)?

3. Read II Samuel 19:8b–15. What is David's challenge as king? What might have been the result if David had killed Amasa for betraying him? Why do you think David replaced Joab as commander?

4. Read II Samuel 19:16-39. David encounters several people on his return to Jerusalem that he encountered on his exile from Jerusalem. How does David handle each encounter and what do we learn from this? Who would Shimei, Mephibosheth and Barzillai represent for you today?

5. Read II Samuel 19:40-43. How does David's situation in the Kingdom remind you of the state of modern day politics? What's the solution? How many more people might die if David does not handle this situation well?

## Application

1. What would it mean for you to respond skillfully to the Shameis, Mephibosheths and Barzillais in your world today? Regardless of the hurt and pain from the past, what would it mean to do the right thing today?

2. Do the answers to the problems in our country come from Washington D.C. or from the Gospel? Do your actions, attitudes and words (and social media posts) reflect your true conviction as to where the answer lies?

3. What can you do today to begin to change the world around you? Where should you focus your attention and what would it mean for you to be a skillful leader in your environment?


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