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1 Samuel 30:1-31

24th Message

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ZIKLAG: RESTORING HOME

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Last Tuesday, the citizens of Kobe in Japan were awakened by a terrible earthquake. In twenty seconds the once bustling port city was reduced to rubble. It was the worst urban disaster in Japan since World War II. More than four thousand people died; two hundred and fifty thousand were left homeless. The television pictures of the horrific devastation evoked memories of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Homeless individuals picked through the rubble, or huddled by makeshift fires, their glazed eyes staring at the embers as they attempted to keep warm amidst the ruined buildings.

What do you do when you lose your home, your family, your entire city? What do you do to soothe the pain? In the midst of tragedy and grief, people oftentimes begin assessing blame; they look for a scapegoat. In our text this morning on the life of David we find our hero in that very position. His men turn on him when they find their city, Ziklag, in ruins, following an Amalekite raid. In our last study we saw that God sent David an urgent message, delivered through the Philistine generals, who doubted his commitment to their cause in the upcoming battle with Israel. The Philistines delivered the message in no uncertain terms: return home at once, they ordered.

As David and his band come near the end of the two-day march south from Aphek to Ziklag, they see smoke on the horizon. A feeling of terror grips their hearts. As they close in on Ziklag, their worst fears are realized. The consequences of David's living as a double agent have finally come home. The tribes to the south of Ziklag, upon whom David had been making his murderous raids, had finally retaliated, and in full measure. The city of Ziklag had been leveled, burned to the ground, and there was no sign of life rising from the ashes. The crestfallen David immediately realized that the implications of his choices extended far beyond his own life. Some six hundred families (about the same number that attend our church) had joined in the new venture in Ziklag. David felt the weight of having put every one of those families at risk, a direct result of his weak faith and poor choices.

What do you do when everything you invested in is suddenly reduced to ruins? Where do you turn when your choices result in devastation to so many? As we will see, the story of Ziklag is a story of restoration.¹

Our text opens with David and his men coming upon the devastated city, following the order to return to where they had come from.

I. Weeping in Ziklag (30:1-6)

Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; and they took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried them off and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and

their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. (1 Sam 30:1-6 NASB)

What did David and his men do when they discovered they had lost everything? They wept "until there was no strength in them to weep." At this point neither David nor his men know that no one had been killed, that the women and children were unharmed. So they go through a hell of grief, weeping until they could weep no more.

Weeping begins the process of restoration.

Then, adding to David's stress, his men become bitter of spirit. This is the same phrase used of these men when they originally joined up with David in Adullam: "everyone who was bitter of soul gathered to him" (1 Sam 22:2). But now they become bitter toward David as they cast about for a scapegoat. The charismatic leader who had planned a new life for them becomes the object of their derision. There is even talk of stoning him. Their actions are reminiscent of the "bitter-souled" Israelites who turned on Moses and wanted to stone him for bringing them into the wilderness (Exod 15:23; 17:4). Ziklag, the symbol of their hopes and dreams, that longed-for real estate, the new Canaan, had become a place of devastation, a burned out memorial to the holocaust where they lost everything.

And what did David do when he had wept so much he could weep no more? He "strengthened himself in the Lord," says the text. How different than his men, whose weeping only resulted in bitterness. How different than Saul, who consulted a medium when he was greatly distressed. But, practically speaking, what does it mean, that David "strengthened himself in the Lord"? David sought strength from his relationship with the Lord. He fully entrusted his fate into the hands of God alone. If there was going to be any restoration, God must accomplish it.

Weeping gives birth to trust. The Hebrew word for trust is rather graphic. It means "to lie extended on the ground," "to give the ground your full weight." If we decide to lean on God we must not hold anything back. When David had done this, he was able to rise out of the ash heap. Last week I had the privilege of praying with two women from our congregation who shortly were to undergo serious surgeries. It was a very gratifying thing to see how both of these women had abandoned themselves to God before they submitted to the scalpel.

After abandoning himself thus, David is ready to consult with God about the next step. Verse 7:

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the LORD saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue all." (30:7-8)

Surrounded by these desperadoes, David asks the priest to bring him the ephod, symbolic of bringing God near. Then David inquires of the Lord. Notice how direct and simple are his requests: "Shall I pursue this band?" Shall I overtake them?" He makes the same kind of petition he made when he sought guidance for holy war in Keilah (23:2). This repetition proves that the basics of spirituality never change.

God's answer is surprisingly brief, and encouraging: "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue all." David receives more than he asks, and is promised sure success. He will overtake them, and he will rescue (all). The verbs are doubled (the English translation notes this by the word "surely") to create a construction that resembles the placing of a crown on David's work, underlining his guaranteed success.² In God's answer we hear an echo of Saul's last words to David: "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail" (26:25).

Notice that once David has wept, God does not waste one word in rebuke of his servant. The silent power of consequences had already spoken. Consequences have had their desired effect: grief expressed in weeping, and repentance evidenced in trust. The first word that David hears from God concerns his availability to direct, to help, and to restore all that David had lost. There is no tongue lashing, no call to penance. David's God is the God of restoration and renewal.

So David and his men set out in pursuit of the Amalekites.

II. Delay by the Brook Besor (30:9-15)

So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those left behind remained. But David pursued, he and four hundred men, for two hundred who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor, remained behind.

Now they found an Egyptian in the field and brought him to David, and gave him bread and he ate, and they provided him water to drink. And they gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. And David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" And he said, "I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick three days ago. We made a raid on the Negev of the Cherethites, and on that which belongs to Judah, and on the Negev of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." Then David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this band." (30:9-15)

The pursuit is interrupted at the brook Besor, a small stream that empties into Gaza. Two hundred of David's men are too exhausted to continue the pursuit. (This demonstrates how difficult it was for David to mobilize an army after the three-day march home from Aphek.) So two hundred men stay behind to guard the baggage, while the four hundred continue in hot pursuit. Similar situations

had never created internal strife before, but this time "it will become a running sore, which David can remedy only by effective lancing."³

Again the pursuit is halted, this time by the discovery of an abandoned Egyptian slave. At first this occurrence seems incidental to the story, but as we shall see later, this man becomes an integral part of the narrative. The slave had been abandoned by his master because of sickness, and he had been without food for three days and nights. He was on the verge of death, and is revived only after a great deal of care, and "cakes of fruit of high food value."⁴ The mention of the three days (which occurs three times in the story) links the image of the dying slave with both David and Saul, whose crossing fates are converging in history. The sick man lay suffering all the time while David marched south from Aphek. Thus, the dying slave becomes a mirror to David of his own soul, which is in desperate need of revival. His plea to David not to deliver him into the hands of his master echoes David's prayer to God regarding his master in 23:11. Furthermore, the day and night when King Saul has fallen in exhaustion and does not eat, after which the medium feeds him, coincides with the Egyptian's third day of hunger, and the time David feeds him and revives him.⁵ At the exact time when David was feeding the Egyptian, a witch was feeding Saul, who too had fallen in exhaustion.

Fokkelman comments that the scene also takes us back to the days of the patriarchs of old who frequently traveled in this desert region, "where there has twice been a threat of a woman's dying through lack of water, together with her child... Hagar, also an Egyptian, the first person in danger of dying of hunger in the Bible, but also the first to see an angel of God, and thanks to that help, find life-bringing water, Gen. 16 and 21."⁶ In our story the slave meets his angel of life, in the form of David. When revived he gives David the vital information to the battle, thus relieving him of the fear of being stoned, and he, too, is revived. "The question which of the two men is happier with the other is fascinating, but not easily decided!"⁷

So in the image of a dying Egyptian, the destinies of two kings converge. Both are at the point of exhaustion. One seeks to be revived by being fed a meal by a witch; the other seeks reviving by loving his enemy, and in the giving, he himself is revived.

What looked like an interruption to the pursuit actually becomes the key that opens the door to victory. With the information gleaned from the slave, David is able to attack the band of Amalekites. The word "band" occurs rarely in Samuel. It is used in this sense only here and in 2 Sam 22:30. Thus we can reasonably assume that David was referring to this event in his song to the Lord, in 2 Samuel 22:

"You, O Lord, are my lamp
The Lord lights up my darkness.
With You I can attack a band,
With my God I can scale a wall." (2 Sam 22:29-30 Fokkelman)⁸

Next, we get the report of the battle.

III. Recovering All (30:16-20)

And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. And David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. But nothing of theirs was

missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought it all back. So David had captured all the sheep and the cattle which the people drove ahead of the other livestock, and they said, “This is David’s spoil.” (30:16-20)

When David and his men arrive at the camp of the Amalekites, they find their enemies caught up in a wild orgy. The narrator uses four participles (“being spread,” “eating,” “drinking,” “dancing”) to show the ongoing nature of the lengthy celebration. The text describes the intensity of the battle: “And David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day.” The attack is fierce, and the recovery complete. To underline the point, the Hebrew word *kol*, meaning “all,” is used five times in four verses (16, 18, 19, 20). And five times the name “David,” the conqueror who restores all, is mentioned. David restored everything—sons, daughters, spoil; nothing was lost. What an amazing outcome! David’s recovery is the focal point of the chapter, the point at which the story turns. The victorious men return to Ziklag, with the spoil in the vanguard of the victory procession, announcing, “This is David’s spoil!” So returns the conquering hero.

But the war is not over yet. On the return journey, David faces a crisis that is even more threatening than the battle itself.

IV. Who Gets the Spoils? (30:21-25)

When David came to the two hundred men who were too exhausted to follow David, who had also been left at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him, then David approached the people and greeted them. Then all the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David answered and said, “Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart.” Then David said, “You must not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us. And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike [lit. ‘as one’]” And so it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day. (30:21-25)

David and his men arrive at Besor and meet their brothers, whom they left behind in a state of exhaustion. As they greet one another, several of the “worthless men” (this term is reminiscent of Deut 15:9, when a “base” thought was said to prevent generosity) are greedy and want to withhold the spoil from those who remained behind with the baggage. The narrator gives more space to this crisis than the battle, to show that “the disunity in their own ranks is more important, since it is more vicious, than the entire battle with the enemy.”⁹

But David poses a question to those who would deny their brothers a share of the spoils: “Who will listen to you in this matter?” In this matter, as in so many others, David rises above Saul, who listened to the voice of the people in the battle with Amalek. David, the leader, however, will not allow the “wicked and worthless” to rule, but “stands firmly on his own feet and gives an uncompromising no.”¹⁰ Division of spoil is not based on function in the battle, but on the theology of brotherhood (“Besor” means “flesh, kinsmen”; the verb means “to announce good news”). Disunity among believers is more of a threat to the gospel than doing battle with the

enemy. The people guarding the baggage were just as important as those who did the fighting. Besides, it was the Lord who gave the victory: “[he] has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us,” says David. So after the battle there ought to be a spirit of generosity in the distribution of the spoils, with no divisions among the brethren. After David was established as king he made sure that this principle, that judgments be based on the equality of brotherhood, not on strength or weakness, was inscribed in the heart of the nation by making it an eternal ordinance in Israel.

The text ends (30:26-31) with a description of the distribution of the spoils. So touched is David by God’s grace, he gives everything away, making sure that anyone who had a share in the kingdom when he was underground receives a share in the magnificent restoration. Thus does Ziklag, the place where everything was lost, become a memorial for all time of the city where everything was restored.

In the New Testament, the story of Ziklag is repeated in the story of Jerusalem, the city where a nation invested all of its hopes and dreams. The disciples were impressed with its splendor, but Jesus wept over the city because, like Ziklag, it was built in fraud and empty faith. Jesus knew that one day it would become an ash heap. In A.D. 70, the Roman armies under Titus killed one million two hundred thousand of its inhabitants. They leveled the city and burned the temple to the ground. But out of the ashes rose the prayers of the King. He overtook the enemy by his own death, defeating the powers of sin and hell. On the third day he was raised from the dead, and he ascended into the heavens with the spoils of war. He then generously distributed these spoils (Eph 4:8) to all his elect, and through these gifts of grace, we join with him in building the new city, the heavenly Jerusalem, in a work of worldwide restoration.

The question I want to leave you with this morning is this: Are you taking part this great work of restoration of the Messianic King?

V. Reflections on the Secrets of Restoration

Our text actually raises four questions.

(a) Have You Wept?

Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. (30:4)

We do not have to wander far from our church doors this morning to witness the devastation caused by sin. We do not have to go to Kobe to see lives in ruins and desolation. Actually, we don’t even have to step outside. All we have to do is look into our own hearts. In them we will find the devastating and far-reaching consequences of our own sinful choices. If we have done this, and if we have been honest with ourselves, here is how we must begin the process of restoration: Do not hide from the devastation all around, but enter into it. It is tragic that many believers cluster together in Christian ghettos, because they can’t face reality. But the first step in restoration is to go to Ziklag, like David, and weep. Restoration can’t begin without the shedding of tears. It is a long process to get to this point, but once we have arrived there, everything else begins to fall into place. Three times in my life I have wept like this: when I lost a son, then a daughter, and third, when my actions placed a Romanian brother’s life in jeopardy. It has occurred to me that I have never wept for the devastation I have caused by my sins in the same way that I have wept over my children. But this is when restoration truly begins.

My life is but a field
stretched out beneath God’s sky,

Some harvest rich to yield.
 Where grows the golden grain?
 Where faith? Where sympathy?
 In a furrow cut by pain.

— Maltbie Babcock

(b) Are You Clinging To God?

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. (30:6b)

Having wept over the devastation at Ziklag, David prayed. He abandoned himself totally to the care of God. He did not grow bitter, like his men, consult with mediums, like Saul, or indulge in bottle or drug to soothe his pain. Let us abandon ourselves to God. There is nothing we can do that he cannot fix. And then, having wept, and abandoned ourselves to God, we must pray for “all.” This word is echoed five times in 1 Timothy 2. Paul says we must pray for “all,” including those in authority over us, because of the greater David, who died as the ransom for “all.” Christ died for “all,” therefore God is eager to redeem “all”—even the king, because God wants to restore “all.”

(c) Are You Loving Your Enemy?

On the road to restoration, God placed before David an abandoned enemy, a slave. At first glance this seemed to slow David's singular pursuit of restoration. He was tempted to pass him by, but God had placed this one before David to give him the opportunity to feed him, wash his wounds, revive him and love him. In the doing, David received a vision of himself. He was just like that Egyptian, abandoned in the desert, his soul dying and in need of revival. As David treated him with dignity and love, washing his wounds and restoring his soul, the Egyptian became the key to open the door to David's own restoration. Now God could restore him by the Brook Besor (“flesh, kinsman”). His enemy had become his brother. This is Brook Besor, the gospel. When we look with love into the eyes of our enemies, it is then we begin to see ourselves. As we heal them, God can begin to restore us and revive our souls. This text clearly shows that restoration begins with one person reaching out and loving another, a former enemy.

The New Testament saints knew how to treat servants and former enemies. They knew that servants are gatekeepers to the kingdom of God. Paul and Silas, who were in prison in Philippi, are a good case in point. These men were praying and singing hymns in their dungeon when an earthquake struck and the prison walls fell down. The suddenly freed prisoners came face to face with their jailer, who was ready to kill himself in despair. But Paul reached out to him with the word of the gospel. The jailer received Christ, and then he took the prisoners to his home and bound up their wounds and fed them. That is true restoration and redemption.

(d) Are You Preserving the Unity Among Brothers?

Once the King had secured his victory, out of a heart overflowing with generosity he gave spiritual gifts to all to enable us all to partake in the building of the heavenly city. What grieves him is internal divisions created by pride of place, like regarding the front line roles as more important than the supportive roles that take place behind the scenes, or limiting the gifts of Christ to a few “authorized” people who hoard leadership to themselves and inhibit weaker saints from ministering. This kind of divisiveness poses a greater threat to the ongoing process of redemption than the enemy that caused the initial destruction. Our King will not stand for this, and he will rebuke us for it. Paul says that the greater gifts are bestowed upon the weaker members, and more abundant honor to those who lack, so that there be no division in the body (1 Cor 12:22-25).

All Christians have a part to play in this restoration. We have all been gifted with divine gifts from Christ's spoils, so that we may take our place in this worldwide rebuilding, until that great day when the heavenly city is completed. When at last we look up and see the New Jerusalem descending from the heavens, our Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes. On that day we will see that not one of the elect is missing, because all will have been restored. This is the lesson of Ziklag.

1. For my observations on this text I am greatly indebted to the excellent work by J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, Vol. 2, *The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 578-596.

2. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 582.
3. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 583.
4. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 583.
5. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 584.
6. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 584.
7. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 586.
8. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 586.
9. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 590.
10. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 590.

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