

## Redemptive Failure | Fall and Rise of the House of David

### *The Retreat*

Second Samuel 15.1-15, 23

9.11.22

*Now it came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men as runners before him. <sup>2</sup> Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate; and when any man had a suit to come to the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And he would say, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel."<sup>3</sup> Then Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Absalom would say, "Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him justice."<sup>5</sup> And when a man came near to prostrate himself before him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. <sup>6</sup> In this manner Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel.*

*<sup>7</sup> Now it came about at the end of forty years that Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. <sup>8</sup> "For your servant vowed a vow while I was living at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the LORD shall indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.'" <sup>9</sup> The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. <sup>10</sup> But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'" <sup>11</sup> Then two hundred men went with Absalom from Jerusalem, who were invited and went innocently, and they did not know anything. <sup>12</sup> And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh, while he was offering the sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom.*

*<sup>13</sup> Then a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." <sup>14</sup> David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise and let us flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."*

*<sup>23</sup> While all the country was weeping with a loud voice, all the people passed over. The king also passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over toward the way of the wilderness.*

In some sense, this entire sermon series is a long illustration of two verses from the Bible, i.e., Romans 8.28-29 that say, "And we know that God works ALL things together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose... whom God also predestined to become like His Son..."

This tragic failure in King David's life is part of the "ALL things" that God will work together for good, what we're calling "redemptive failure." We all have failures. Many of us have had major, catastrophic failures. Few of us have failed as greatly as David did, i.e., by stealing a friend's wife and then killing the friend (and others; 2 Sam 11.17) in order to cover up his adultery and sacrilege.

But if God can turn this evil in David to ultimate GOOD... then He can do so in your life and mine as well. Not all failures are redemptive but believers in Jesus Christ have a promise from God Himself that even our failures will be redeemed and will be used to set us free to love like Jesus Christ loved.

Today we look at the arena or workshop where God often performs His divine alchemy and changes the lead of our failings into the gold of Christ-likeness. That workshop is the WILDERNESS. David is in retreat and along with many of his supporters, he's fleeing from Absalom into a place where no one cares to go – a place of pain and deprivation...where the believer sees his or her desperate need for God.

**Today, the believer in Jesus Christ and the “wilderness experience”:**

- 1) How'd it happened for David?**
- 2) How it happens for us and what to do about it.**

The situation that got David into the wilderness for this SECOND time (first time it was Saul) – this time it was a bitter, angry, disappointed son, Absalom.

We've seen how David exasperated Absalom by not confronting the sexual assault of David's daughter and Absalom's sister. David got mad, but Amnon walked.

Two years of David's ignoring the crime and not bringing the rapist, Amnon, to justice left Absalom so disgusted that he became a vigilante. He had his brother killed for his crime. Then Absalom fled to his maternal grandparents in Syria. Three years later he was brought back to Jerusalem but even then, David let Absalom stew and waited two years to see his son and when David finally met with Absalom it was only official and NOT parental, not relational (King not Dad).

And all this was a result of David welcoming arrogance, sexual sin and murder into his family... His own hypocrisy has rooted itself in his family and then deliberately persisting in his pride with his son.

Absalom is now a hot-head (all that hair) and has begun to actively campaign against his father. If you look at the first paragraph, you'll find at least twelve separate measures Absalom employees: he drives in a large, black SUV with dark windows in a showy motorcade. He has 50 secret service guards. He emphasizes how valid everyone's lawsuits are... and sympathizes with them about how hard it is to get an appointment with the king.

He's shaking hands and kissing babies. He's holding court (in the gate) and in the end (quote), *“Absalom stole the away the hearts of all the Israelites!”* He's a man of the people – not arrogant like “the king.”

He started – not just conspiracy *theories* – but in v. 12, “...the conspiracy was strong.” He’s plotting; doing the behind-the-scenes work to start a revolution. And he even asks the king if he can travel to Hebron which was the place where David, 40 years earlier had begun his reign – it’s all highly symbolic!

People are choosing sides. It’s politics at its worst ...in all its sin and ugliness. David’s advisor whose counsel was like the mind of God (16.23), Ahithophel, joins the rebellion. Ahithophel was grandfather to Bathsheba (no wonder he’s fed up with David!)

When David sees that Absalom has the upper hand, David leaves his concubines (foreshadowing! And what’s David doing with concubines anyway?) and David takes his loyalists and he flees for his life. (V. 23) *“The king also passed over the brook Kidron (lit. “darkness”), and all the people passed over into the way of the wilderness.”*

Just like that, David is in retreat... in the wilderness.

Now the wilderness/exile theme is a big, sweeping motif in the Bible. Adam was sent out of the garden into the wilderness, “East of Eden” (Gen 3.24).

Noah retreated on that 40-day cruise (Gen 7).

Abraham is called to leave his family in Ur and go to an unknown place (Gen 12.1-7) Jacob goes into the wilderness to escape Esau (Gen 28.10ff). Israel leaves Egypt and goes into the wilderness for 40 years (Exodus). Job’s ordeal was a “wilderness experience”. Elijah fled to the wilderness (1Kings 17).

And of course, Jesus Christ, is exiled to Egypt (with Joseph and Mary) and then again after He was baptized, He was led by the Spirit into the desert to face the prowling lion (1 Pet 5.8) and the wild beasts for 40 days of testing (Mat.4.1-11 et al)

In most cases, the wilderness experience is a time of deprivation, loneliness and pain but also a time when God reveals himself with new clarity. Let’s look at the retreat into the wilderness as it appeared in David’s life but also as an indispensable part of true spirituality in our lives as well.

Let’s ask three questions about this experience: 1) How do we get into the wilderness?

2) What should we do in the wilderness?

3) What happens AFTER the experience?

How do we get into the wilderness? Well, anytime there’s an intense disruption of our normal routine and we find ourselves in a place of deprivation or loss or loneliness we can consider ourselves in the wilderness.

Usually, it’s involuntary and almost always unpleasant; even the Exodus, which began as a rescue, soon became awful when they missed the security of Egypt.

And it can go that way – a person can break with a destructive habit (very rewarding) and then later the deprivation and loss become acute and painful. It can come by a physical injury or sickness or by a financial loss, loss of employment, retirement; it can come by relational loss – death of a loved one or a broken relationship. This was the case with David. His beloved son and his good friend and advisor Ahithophel were now estranged and hateful toward him.

Relationships are such an incredibly potent source of fulfillment but also pain – and so many of the Psalms revolve around David and others dealing honestly with the disruption of relationships. Psalm 3 is attributed to this phase in David's life. In Psalm 55 David reflects on Ahithophel: *"for it is not an enemy who attacks me then I could take it – but it's YOU my equal my companion and close friend."* Relational breakdown HURTS... a lot... and it feels like a dry, strange place.

Now, I said that most often we don't choose the wilderness – it chooses us – God brings disruption into our lives. We may even have caused it or added to it, but we'd never have chosen it.

And yet – I'd be negligent if I didn't mention a kind of voluntary wilderness experience – there's a discipline of retreat. Remember Jesus Christ's wilderness experience was just this type. He followed the Spirit into the wilderness; He chose it and then at regular intervals Jesus Christ withdrew to a lonely place (a discipline of solitude).

Also, the nation of Israel: one of the major feasts was a reminder of the wilderness – they would sleep in tents to remember the wilderness wanderings and to once again disrupt the routine and meet God outside. Our Jewish friends continue this feast today.

And some astute observers have diagnosed the parched souls of modern Western Christians as a result of ignorance of the discipline of retreat, solitude, simplicity and silence.

And it's very easy to think that we're so busy and so important and that all the progress and politics and pomp of US is what really matters – we can fall-in with the world's agenda in the name of activism or involvement and soon we're like donkeys on a treadmill chasing a carrot... to quote Paul Simon once again, *"we're working our jobs collecting our pay believe we're gliding down the highway when in fact we're slip sliding away"*. C.S. Lewis said that no day was complete without a walk in the open air – to stand out under the canopy of God's space and have all our pomp and self-importance exposed by the magnificence of God's heavens.

The disciplines of deprivation – fasting, prayer, silence, solitude, simplicity: sometimes God brings them and yet there's also a standing invitation to all God's people to come away. Jesus Christ went into the wasteland to change it once again into a Garden.

You may remember that as David crossed the Brook Kidron, which means darkness and entered the wilderness, Jesus Christ also crossed the same brook in John's Gospel chapter 18 and across the ravine

Kidron there was a garden... It's a kind of emblem that Jesus Christ retreated into the wilderness to turn it back into a Garden.

To all who trust Him, Jesus Christ the One who was crucified "outside the camp" (Heb 13.11-13) calls us to go out with Him *"in the Garden in the cool of the day..."* Our wilderness experience is sanctified by His suffering... He emerges from the ultimate exile of death and walks out of the tomb into a Garden.

Now, what do we do when we find ourselves in the wilderness? Well sometimes you can only cry in the wilderness – regret, remorse, might meet you there. The first inclination may be to just survive – you've lost your health; lost your friend; lost your home or job – you may be initially preoccupied with getting back to normalcy – because the wilderness feels so abnormal! And yet what the psalmists seem to do eventually is to wait in the wilderness (listen!):

"Wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord" (Psa 27)

"Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him" (Psa 37)

"My soul, wait in silence for God alone; my hope comes from Him..." (Psalm 62)

"I am weary with my crying; my eyes fail while I wait for my God" (Psalm 69)

"I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait and in His word do I hope, more than the watchman waits for the morning, I wait for the Lord." (Ps 130)

The wilderness experience isn't just a stoic endurance of difficult circumstances: *"I'll get through this period of loss and then get back to normal, back to how it was!"* No, when you're facing the wilderness IN CHRIST and waiting on God, you'll find yourself saying, "if I could have normal or the Lord – I'll wait for the Lord"

Somehow, in the wilderness what I come to want is God – to know Him and to rest in Him.

Second, in the wilderness, in retreat/loss WE LISTEN. David was dull – even after his repentance from arrogance and murder – he'd become dull to God, to his surroundings and to others.

David had become strangely passive and distracted, Stuff was going on all around him, right under his nose but he seemed oblivious. Absalom wanted to take a big group to Hebron: that's where David started his reign. "David, hello? Can't you see what's happening?"

So, we listen in the wilderness – we look for what we know to somehow become alive and more real. "I know that Jesus Christ entered the wilderness for me, endured the exile of death for me. I know

that my guilt was laid on Him. I know that His grace is better than life itself.” But now, in the wilderness, I look to the Spirit to assure my heart. And this experiential encounter with God is what the wilderness can bring.

I love this verse and God really brought it home to my own heart when I was in a period of wilderness wandering; Psalm 81 verse 10: *“I am the Lord your God who brought you up from the land of Egypt – open your mouth wide and I will fill it.”* God feeds His people in the desert!

God spoke through the prophet Hosea to his Bride (the Church) before the time of Christ and said these remarkable words, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness and speak kindly to her.” (2.14) Because Jesus Christ went into the wilderness FOR US, then the wasteland becomes a place where God fills us with His grace and wins our hearts.

Away from the noise of the routine and the hype of human activity, God calls us to wait, to listen, to open our mouths expectantly and He becomes our chief Delight.

Now, our final question is “WHAT NEXT?”

Well, judging from David’s experience and from the Psalms he wrote while on this retreat, David is awakened in the wilderness. He retreats but he emerges. He doesn’t become an escapist or an isolationist what we might call a Pietist. Nor does he become an activist, making a name for himself

What we see in David, after the retreat, is a confidence that “this is my Father’s world” and He alone CAN and WILL make it right. He’s the only True King who rules without overblown campaign promises and all the foam and froth of human muscle. If we really meet the Lord in the desert, we join Him in tending to His world. We become pliable, compassionate, humble and confident.

After the great ordeal that happened in the life of Job, after one of the greatest wilderness experiences in the whole Bible, Job says this: *“I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you.”* (42.5)

If you’re NOT believing in Jesus Christ and not loving His people (the Church) you really have no assurance that your failings and deep regrets will work out.

If, on the other hand, you believe that the worst thing to ever take place on our planet – the rejection of God in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – if Jesus represented you in His life, death and resurrection – then you can face the wilderness (the disorientation, loneliness, facing deep junk in your own character that’s now surfaced) – you can face it with confidence (and even go there voluntarily!) because on the other side of the valley of death... over the Brook Kidron, the wilderness is become a Garden where God walks with His people in the cool of the day.