

A story is told of a woman whose car gets stalled in traffic. She looks in vain under the hood to identify the cause, while the driver behind her leaned relentlessly on his horn. Finally she had had enough. She walked back to his car and sweetly said, "I don't know what is wrong with my car. But if you want to go look under the hood, I'll be glad to *wait* here and honk for you." *Waiting*. No one likes to wait. But we do wait. We wait in traffic, we wait in grocery stores, we wait at the bank, we wait to see the doctor, we wait for our spouses, we wait for our children, we wait for retirement, we wait for the birth of new life, we wait for the certainty of death, we wait for Jesus to come back, and we wait for me to stop talking about the things we wait for. We wait because life is composed of waiting periods. Children must wait until they are old enough to have a bicycle, youth must wait until they are old enough to drive a car, college students must wait for their diplomas, young couples must wait until they have saved enough money to buy a new home. The art of waiting is not learned at once; it is a life-long process.

We see a lot of waiting in the Word of God. Sarah and Abraham had to wait until they had reached the ages of 90 and 100 respectively before God blessed them with a son. Joseph waited 13 years to get out of prison, and it was another 7 years before he saw his family again. God's people waited 400 years before they were released from their bondage of slavery in Egypt; and once freed God's people waited for 40 years as they wandered the desert in search of the Promised Land. In the New Testament we read that Simeon, a righteous and devout man, waited his entire life to see the birth of the long-promised Messiah. But while we know these stories about the people of God to be true, we still don't like to wait. And when we do have to wait, in our impatience, we often try our best to cut down the waiting time. In 1 Peter 3:8 the apostle Peter wrote: "*One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*" It's said that an accountant read those words and he knelt in prayer and asked: "Lord - is it true that a thousand years for us is just like a *minute* to you?" God said: "Yes." The account replied: "Then a million dollars to us must just be a penny to you." God said: "Yes." To which the account then responded: "Lord, would you give me one of those pennies?" To which God said: "All right. Just wait here a *minute*."

This morning, as we continue in our series of sermons focused on the life of King David, in search of the depth of what God meant when He said: "*I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will*" (Acts 13:22) – we will see that “waiting” is a blessing in the Kingdom of God. As we enter the book of 2 Samuel today, we find ourselves at a pivotal point in David's life - in that when we consider what happened in David's life up to now in 1 Samuel, he spent a great deal of his time *waiting*. In our text for today we will see that David finally became the king over Judah, 15 years after he had first been anointed by Samuel – and we will also see that it was another 7 years before David was anointed to be king over all of Israel. This means David *waited* over 20 years of his life to be made king. Today, in 2 Samuel 1-4, we will see 1) *why* God made David wait so long and 2) *how* David handled this more than two-decade delay in waiting for the fulfillment of God's anointing for him to be the King.

We left off last Sunday at the end of 1 Samuel, with King Saul continuing his jealous pursuit of spearing David to death, and twice David was given an opportunity by God to take Saul out for good, but he does not do so. One might think that while fleeing from Saul, David would not be able to serve God's people, but that was not the case; he still continued to carry out raids against the enemies of Israel. But because Saul had turned some of Israel against him, David fled to Ziklag, a city of Israel's enemy, the Philistines – which puts him between a rock and a hard place, when the Philistines made plans to attack Israel. But in His sovereign providence God took David and his followers out of the picture – and he returned to Ziklag to discover the city has been sacked by a band of Amalekite raiders, their wives and their families kidnapped, and their goods and livestock plundered. David and his men head south towards Judah and chase down and defeat the Amalekites and recover all that was lost. At the same time to the north the Philistines are at war with Saul and the army of Israel. The Philistines end up defeating Israel and during the battles Saul and three of his sons are killed.

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." And David said to him, "How did it go? Tell me." And he answered, "The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead." Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" And the young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' And he said to me, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord."

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. And David said to the young man who told him, "Where do you come from?" And he answered, "I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite." David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died. And David said to him, "Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'" 2 Samuel 1:1-16

David and his men have been back in Ziklag for two days when a young Amalekite arrives, breathless from his journey from the camp of Israel, where he manages to escape the Philistines. He tells David the sad news of the defeat of Israel and of the death of Saul and Jonathan. When David presses this young man for more details, he claims he was the one who mercifully put Saul out of his misery. He presents David with Saul's "crown and armlet", expecting David to be most grateful and generous. A lesser man would have rejoiced that his enemy was slain, but David was a man after God's own heart and felt keenly the tragedy of Saul's sin in his dear friend Jonathan's death, and the judgment that was brought upon so many innocent people because of Saul's disobedience. It is more than ironic that it was an Amalekite that brought the news and claimed to be the one who took Saul's life. Had Saul obeyed God in 1 Samuel 15 to slay *all* of the Amalekites, this never would have happened. The sin we fail to slay is the one that will slay us. After David and his men mourn over the defeat and death of their countrymen, David has the young man executed for raising his hand against the Lord's anointed. It is then that David composes a song of mourning (17-27), which memorializes Saul and Jonathan as heroes. There are no unkind words about Saul in the song. David's chief concern is that the Lord's anointed has been slain and while God's glory has been dimmed, the enemies of God would not rejoice over their victory over Saul; "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!" (2 Samuel 1:19).

After this David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" And the Lord said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" And he said, "To Hebron." So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the towns of Hebron. And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When they told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul," David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him. Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing. Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them." 2 Samuel 2:1-7

After nearly 15 years of waiting for the fulfillment of Samuel's anointing, years that were mostly spent fleeing from Saul, David is finally anointed as the king of the southern kingdom of Judah. David's first recorded act as king of Judah, after hearing that it was *"the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul"* – was to send messengers to commend the men of Jabesh-gilead for honoring Saul, at great risk to themselves. In this act we begin to see the first of many political intrigues that would plague David throughout all of his life. Even though David was a man after God's own heart, who sought the mind of God, so that he would have the wisdom of God - he could not escape the plots and plans of others. He was indebted to many men, it was difficult for David to oppose them. His march to the throne would be a difficult one.

We see that clearly in 2 Samuel 2-4 as three of the main characters in those chapters are Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. All three were David's nephews, sons of David's half-sister Zeruiah (1 Chronicles 2:16) and all three were valued men in the army of Judah. In these three chapters we also read of Ish-bosheth and Abner, the first being Saul's son and the second being Saul's cousin (1 Samuel 14:50) who was also the commander of Saul's army in Israel. And these all begin to connect into a tangled web of politics and war right after King David commended the *"men of Jabesh-gilead"* to let their hands be strong, and to be valiant because Saul was dead and the house of Judah has anointed David as king to rule over them.

But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. 2 Samuel 2:8-10

In the face of David's public proclamation that he is now the anointed King of God's people, Abner, the commander of Saul's army, makes Saul's son Ish-bosheth the king over the tribes in the north and he relocates the capital to protect himself from King David's army. But Abner also had personal interest in the family of Saul since he was Saul's cousin and it was to his advantage to see Ish-bosheth reign - even though he deliberately rebelled against God's Word when he crowned him. God had made it very clear that David alone was to rule Israel. After Ish-bosheth is crowned king the army of Israel led by Abner, and the army of Judah led by Joab, go to war. In the midst of the battle Abner murders Asahel which results in the reality of 1 Samuel 3:1: *"There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker."*

In chapter 3 we read that Abner becomes even more bold. As he was always the real power behind the scenes, he eventually casts aside all pretenses by taking Saul's concubine for himself. This is more than King Ish-bosheth can handle and he confronts Abner. Abner pushes back and scolds the king for his ingratitude and reminds him who is really in charge - and he then decides it's time to change sides. Abner tries to make a peace with David, but the Joab and Abishai plot against Abner and Joab kills him. When David learns of Abner's murder he publicly condemns the murder and calls down divine judgment on Joab and his family. David then mourns the death of Abner, seeing to it that his burial is honorable, even if his death was not - which causes David's standing with God's people to increase.

"When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed" (2 Samuel 4:1). With the death of Abner at the hand of Joab, Ish-bosheth loses all of his courage. He was hardly able to stand up to Abner, let alone even think about standing up against David. Now Ish-bosheth is on his own, knowing that David is set up to rule in his place. Two men think of a solution; as commanders of Israelite soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin, they take it upon themselves to murder Ish-bosheth. They then cut off his head and travel all night to show David that they put his enemy to death - not understanding David's heart for God to be in submission to God, which caused him to refuse to raise his hand against the ones whom God anoints to be His leaders of His people. And so David had the two men put to death. David's road to the throne was a bloody one. What a contrast to our Savior who shed His own blood, and not the blood of others, to gain the throne of God.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. 2 Samuel 5:1-5

David finally succeeds Saul to the God-anointed throne of serving as King to all of the chosen people of God. David had reigned seven years over the tribe of Judah; now he was to reign over the entire nation of a united Israel for thirty-three years, for a total of forty years. This was David's third anointing - Samuel had anointed him in Bethlehem, and the men of Judah had anointed him at Hebron. And through all those years David patiently waited on God, trusting in the sovereignty of God and the faithfulness of God to fulfill all of His promises. *This is the process of God by which God shaped and molded David's heart to a man after God's own heart, to do all of God's will.* David went through the wilderness testing of his trust in God; and David experienced the caves of fully giving himself to God, so that he would be prepared and equipped to serve God. And so when the time came to rid himself of the difficult trials, painful struggles and life-threatening events that came into his life – David chose to trust God, because he had experienced the reality that God is faithfully sovereign over absolutely everything.

Waiting on God may be one of the most difficult aspects of what it means to be a Christian. Second only to suffering, waiting may be the greatest teacher and trainer of faith, character, godliness and maturity most of us will ever encounter. The purposes of God often develop slowly because His grand designs are never hurried. Some of the greatest missionaries in history devotedly spread the seed of God's Word and yet had to wait long periods of time before seeing the fruit of their efforts. William Carey labored 7 years before the first Hindu convert was brought to Christ in India. Adoniram Judson toiled 7 years before his faithful preaching was rewarded in Burma. In western Africa, it was 14 years before one person received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In New Zealand, it took 9 years; and in Tahiti, it was 16 years before the first harvest of souls began. Thomas a Kempis described that kind of waiting in these words: "He deserves not the name of patient who is only willing to suffer as much as he thinks proper, and for whom he pleases. The truly patient man asks (nothing) from whom he suffers, (whether) his superior, his equal, or his inferior...But from whomever, or how much, or how often wrong is done to him, he accepts it all as from the hand of God, and counts it gain!"

Waiting on God for His kingdom benefits is done in God's time and for God's purposes. Waiting is not just something we have to do, to we get what we want, but rather *waiting is the process of becoming what God wants us to be.* What God does in us while we wait is more important than what it is we are waiting for. Waiting, biblical waiting, is not a passive waiting around for something to happen that will allow us to escape our troubles. Waiting does not mean doing nothing. It is not fatalistic resignation. It is not a way to evade unpleasant reality. Those who wait are those who work, because they know their work is not in vain. A farmer can wait all summer for his harvest because he has done his work of sowing the seed and watering the plants. Those who wait on God can go about their assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and conclusions to their lives and the harvest to their toil. Waiting is the confident, disciplined, expectant, active, and sometimes painful clinging to God. Waiting knows that we will reap a reward. When Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem, he was telling them that this was a means of experiencing his work for his purposes with his power. In waiting they would catch the wind of God's Spirit. In waiting they would see God move and they would see the promise of God fulfilled. Waiting on God requires patient trust on our part. Waiting on God means that we give God the benefit of the doubt that he knows what he is doing. Waiting on God is God's way of seeing if we will trust him or ourselves or someone else or something else before we move forward - whether it has to do with ourselves, our families, our relationships, our finances, our careers, our dreams, or our churches.

Waiting on God reminds us that God is sovereignly in control. In Psalm 130:5-6 the Psalmist writes: *“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.”* In biblical times, watchmen vigilantly guarded the city. They watched for enemies who might attack at night, and they waited for the sun to come up. They were alert and obedient, ready to respond when needed. When called upon, they sprang into action. But on the other hand, watchmen didn't make things happen. They didn't control the rising of the sun. They couldn't speed up the process of the dawning of a new day. A watchman knew the difference between his job and God's job. Waiting reminds us that we are not God and that we are not in charge.

Waiting on God allows God to do His work. God works deep inside of our hearts, shaping our character, when we patiently wait on Him. The Chinese bamboo tree is one of the most remarkable plants on earth. Once the gardener plants the seed, he will see nothing but a single shoot coming out of the bulb for *four full years*. That tiny shoot must have daily food and water, and all the time the gardener is caring for the plant the exterior shoot will grow less than an inch. But at the end of four years the Chinese bamboo performs an incredible feat. It grows ninety feet tall in ninety days. When did the tree grow? The answer lies in the unseen part of the tree, the underground root system. During the first four years, the fibrous root structure spreads wide and deep down in the earth, preparing to support the incredible heights the tree will eventually reach. This is how God works in us when we wait on God.

Waiting on God increases our spiritual strength. In Isaiah 40:31 the prophet writes: *“They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”* What this means is that waiting on the Lord is not passive; on the contrary it is active; it is building concentrated strength. Waiting on God is like lifting weights; our “spiritual muscles” gets stronger as, over time, God does His work in us, breaking us down and healing us up. Philippians 2:12-13 says *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* David knew waiting on God increased his strength. As he waited on God for 15 years and then 7 more years, David wrote Psalms that reflected the spiritual muscle strength he gained in the wilderness testing of his trust in God, and in the caves of fully giving himself to God, so that he would be prepared, equipped and *empowered* to serve Him.

Psalm 21:1, 13: *O LORD, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults! . . . Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.*

Psalm 28:7: *The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.*

Psalm 59:9, 16-17: *O my Strength, I will watch for you, for you, O God, are my fortress. . . . I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.*

Psalm 138:3: *On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.*

Psalm 140:7: *O LORD, my Lord, the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of battle.*

The story is told of a man who had a dream, where God told him to go outside and push against a huge boulder in his front yard. So every morning for the next few weeks, the man went outside and strained, pushed, groaned, prodded and shoved, but the rock never budged. Finally, in a fit of exasperation the man fell to his knees and lifted his eyes to heaven. "What were you thinking, Lord? he cried, wiping sweat from his brow. "You told me to push this rock, and I've been pushing it for weeks, yet it has not moved an inch!" A voice from heaven rumbled among the clouds, then whispered in the man's ear. "I told you to *push* the stone," God said, "I *didn't* tell you to *move* it. I'm the only one who can move it, and when you're ready, I will. By the way, look at your hands, arms and chest." The man looked at his hands; they had grown callused and tough. And he looked at his arms and chest; they both bulged with muscles he had never had before. Though his efforts seemed fruitless, he had grown stronger than ever.

God is the great mover. But even so, while we wait on God we are to work, to push. And if we wait, in patiently trust, remembering that God is in control doing his work increasing our strength, we will experience a great movement of God on our lives and in our church. We see this right after David was anointed King over all of Israel. The new king now needed a capital city, and 2 Samuel 5:6-10 tells us that David chose Jerusalem, a stronghold city that had never been captured (Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21). When approached, the Jebusites arrogantly defied David, taunting David's army to attack them. But in the strength of God, David and his men turned the Jebusite's taunts into cries of defeat.

And we also read that no sooner was David established in his own city than the old enemy, the Philistines, returned (2 Samuel 5:17-25). How true this is in our personal lives: Satan waits for the "peace after the storm" to attack us again. David knew that God's will was the only way to victory, so David immediately consulted Him: "*And David inquired of the Lord, 'Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?' And the Lord said to David, 'Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand'"* (vs 19). King David and his men did attack, and they won. But then the Philistines returned, and King David wisely sought God's counsel again, as God told David they should attack the Philistines in a different way, which gave them ultimate victory. In the same way, we must take care not to keep doing "carbon copies" of God's will, but to seek God's counsel anew for each and every decision. God is the great mover. While we wait on God we are to seek God's counsel in how to push.

David's road to the throne covered many years and many trials, but throughout that journey he put God first and never sought vengeance or retaliation against Saul. In response God saw to it that David was protected and promoted according to His time and plan. God will do the same for us if we will but trust Him. It was God's will that David reign over the entire nation of Israel, just as it is God's will that Jesus Christ be Lord over all of our lives. Any part that of our lives that is left outside of God's will is going to rebel against God and cause trouble. We are of the same "*bone and flesh.*" (Ephesians 5:30) of the people that David was, and we ought to seek to do all of God's will and invite God to reign over us.

On the night before Jesus was crucified, as he sat in the shadow of the cross, our Lord prayed: "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*" Because Jesus had a heart to do all of God's will, he sacrificed his life on cross, taking our place and taking our penalty for sin on himself, so that by his resurrection we might know forgiveness and redemption and healing and restoration with God, when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise to send a Savior into the world. God faithfully worked out that promise through many years of waiting. He is still doing so today. Yes, Jesus has come and he has risen. But we now wait for his return! And waiting for that is not just something we have to do but rather we are to work at the process of becoming what God wants us to be. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. What God does in us while we wait is more important than what it is we are waiting for. *Waiting on God increases our spiritual strength.* God is the great mover. May He strengthen our hearts for Him today!

*I love you, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.
Psalm 18:1-3*

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill;
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread;
Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense but trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste but sweet will be the flow'r.
Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain.

William Cowper

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Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church