

Defeating the rival to the throne

1 Kings 1:5-8

Who is your greatest enemy? When we examine the life of David, the good, the bad and the ugly, one thing that is apparent is that his greatest enemy wasn't king Saul or Goliath or anyone else. David's greatest enemy was David. And the same is true of our lives.

Concerning what happens when our passions within go unchecked, James writes: *“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel”* (James 4:1-2)

Our greatest enemy is not our boss, it's not our spouse, it's not our neighbor or anyone else. It's not even the devil. Our greatest enemy is not without, it's within. It's our sinful desires which are at war within us.

When we fail to recognize that our number one enemy is the unholy trinity within, namely, me, myself and I, the focus that we need to live the Christian life will be in the wrong place.

Main idea: The reigning King defeats the rival king when the rightful king takes his place on the throne.

This morning we are going to examine the rivalry that took place for the throne of David. From this rivalry, we are going to glean some lessons about dealing with the rival within our own hearts. To learn these lessons, we are going to unfold our scripture passage under the headings, the rival king, the rightful king and the reigning king.

1. The rival king:

First, let's examine the rival king to the throne of David. While David, who was advanced in years and confined to his bedchamber, Adonijah, one of his sons, made a power move for the throne of his Father.

In verse five we read: *“Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. 6 His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?” He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom. 7 He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. 8 But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah.(1 Kings 1:5-8).*

It's important to note that in addition to making himself king, Adonijah was also opposing God who already declared to David that Solomon would be the heir to the throne. The fact that Solomon was the rightful heir to the throne has great significance not only in the times of David, but also for us in our day.

According to God's promises, David's kingdom would be established forever. This is true because Jesus will one day sit upon his throne to rule and reign forever (Luke 1:31-33).

As Alistair Begg explained: “The story of king David and the promise that was made to king David, is the answer to your life. It's the answer to your ten-year-old life, twenty-year-old life, your fifty, sixty and ninety-five-year-old life. The promise that was made to king David is the hope of the world—the entire world. Not just because the story of the kingdom is the truth of the gospel. It is the fact that this king who is promised through the line of David is the one who will embody all that makes it possible for the world to be the way that God originally intended it.”

So, there's a bigger picture here besides the fact that Adonijah was a rival to the throne of David. He was also a rival to the throne, which by divine decree belongs to Jesus the King of kings and Lord of lords.

How many of you know, there is an already and not yet reality to Christ's kingdom. Jesus will one day sit on the throne of David to rule

and reign on the earth. But until then, King Jesus already reigns in the hearts of those who have received Him by faith as Savior and Lord.

Jesus is the rightful King to the throne of our hearts. But like Adonijah, do you realize that there is a rival to the throne of our hearts? The bible calls this rival the *flesh*, which speaks of our carnal sinful nature.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 7:22: *“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin”* (Romans 7:22-24).

In this passage, the Apostle Paul described what he calls a war raging in his body. Paul said that when he wanted to do right, evil was present within him. Do you know the struggle that Paul is talking about? Is there a war going on inside of you? Are you aware of the rival and rebel in you that wants to control your life?

In a sense, to know this struggle is evidence that you’ve been made alive unto God through the regenerating work of the Spirit (Titus 3:4-5). As a result, the Spirit is producing in you holy desires and affections that are contrary to the desires and affections of your old sinful nature.

Let me be clear, Paul doesn’t tell us about this struggle so that we would throw up our hands in defeat. He’s telling us about this war raging inside of us to point us to the victory that we have in and through Christ.

Now before we look more into the victory we have in Christ, let’s examine further the insight that God’s word gives us about Adonijah’s rebellion.

After explaining that Adonijah had exalted himself to be king, the word of God adds this significant commentary: ***“His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?”*** (1 Kings 1:6a).

What does this significant insight into David’s family life mean? It means that David allowed his son to do whatever he desired. He never wanted to displease him—he never wanted him to be unhappy.

Let’s me ask you, why was David, who stood up to Goliath, so passive about dealing with the inherent selfishness that was dominating Adonijah’s life? I want to suggest to you that his passivity may have something to do with his past moral failures. Perhaps he felt that he lacked the moral authority to correct his children—to say when they made unwise decisions, “Why have you done thus and so?”

Now, we need to lead our children by example. They need to see in our marriages and in our lives the difference that only Christ can make when He’s in charge. But at the same time we cannot allow our past failures to make us passive about speaking truth to others; especially our children. God is a God of redemption. He specializes in restoring broken lives.

If, like David, you have moral failures in your past or in the present, seek God’s forgiveness, and the forgiveness of those in your area of influence, who may have been adversely affected by your failures. The people in our circle of influence will not learn anything good from our hypocrisy, but they can learn from our humility.

Now in the case of Adonijah, David’s passivity appears to have contributed to Adonijah’s inability to delay gratification or to understand that you can’t always have what you want when you want it. More than that, Adonijah didn’t have the faith to wait for the Lord and trust that His will is best.

Likewise, if we put the happiness of our children above their holiness—their comfort above their character, we may pacify them for the moment, but in the end, we’re only fueling their selfishness.

Let me emphasize that the aim of godly parenting is much greater than giving children rules so that they might live disciplined lives. Christian apologist Josh McDowell said it well, “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion.”

It appears that David not only failed to correct and discipline Adonijah, he never even had meaningful conversations with him. He didn’t seek to cultivate a relationship of trust with his son. He didn’t take the time to know what was going on in the heart of his son.

Let me emphasize also that the ultimate goal of Christian parenting is not developing disciplined children, but to make disciples of Jesus. More than rules, children need a relationship with Christ—they need to know Him as the rightful King so that they might give Him the preeminent place in their hearts and lives.

And the same is true in our own personal lives. As the Apostle Paul exhorted believers in Romans 13:14: “*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*” To keep the rival for the throne of our hearts in check, we must not coddle it. Rather we must crucify it through our identification with Christ.

This brings us to our second point, the rightful king.

2. The rightful King

After learning of Adonijah’s rebellion, the prophet Nathan advised Bathsheba to inform David about the conspiracy. In verse 11 we read: “*Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, “Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it? 12 Now therefore come, let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. 13 Go in at once to King David, and say to him, ‘Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, “Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne”?’ Why then is Adonijah king?’ 14 Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words.”* (1 King 1:11-14).

Notice that the prophet Nathan didn't confront Adonijah himself. This wasn't a matter of fear on Nathan's part, but of wisdom. More than likely Nathan would not have been able to approach Adonijah who had already gained support from key leaders, including Joab the commander of the army.

Nathan understood that the only measure that could be taken at this point was for king David to install the rightful heir to his throne. The rightful king would have the power and authority to deal with the rival to the throne.

Similarly, there is a selfish nature present within each of us—a rival to the throne of our hearts, which must be dealt with strategically and decisively. When the flesh goes unchecked—when we yield to our selfish desires, instead of yielding to the Spirit, we will not only be controlled by the flesh, our unrestrained desires will bring corruption to our lives and hurt to those around us.

Remember, our greatest enemy is not our boss, our spouse, our neighbor or anyone else. Our greatest enemy is our sinful nature.

“In his book, ‘When Sinners say I do,’ Dave Harvey writes, ‘What if you abandoned the idea that the problems and weaknesses in your marriages are caused by lack of information, dedication, or communication? What if you saw your problems as they truly are: caused by a war within your heart?’ (Harvey, Sinners, 29). If a husband or wife walks in the flesh, not the Spirit, then there will be devastating results. Both people must deal with their own hearts if they want to live in harmony.” (Exposition Commentary, Galatians).

This will also be the case with all other relationships. When our sinful and self-centered nature is not dealt with by the rightful king through the Spirit, we will constantly be part of the problem not the solution. Rather than helping to bring harmony in our homes, or in the church, our self-centered desires and ambitions will be a constant source of strife, division, and conflict.

On the other hand, when Christ reigns in our hearts, we will know the peace of God that surpasses understanding. As a result, we will be the voice of calm in the storm, we will be the instruments that God uses to bring restoration and reconciliation to fractured and broken relationships.

This leads to our final point, the reigning king

3. The Reigning King

David took the advice of Nathan and his wife Bathsheba and had Solomon installed as king. When Solomon, the rightful heir to the throne of David began to reign, his first order of business was to take care of the rival king and put him in his place.

Beginning in verse 49 we read: *“Then all the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way. ⁵⁰ And Adonijah feared Solomon. So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. ⁵¹ Then it was told Solomon, “Behold, Adonijah fears King Solomon, for behold, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.’” ⁵² And Solomon said, “If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die.” ⁵³ So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, “Go to your house” (1 Kings 1:49-53).*

When the rightful king began to reign, he put the rival king in check and brought him under control. What David his father never did, Solomon did in his very first authoritative action as the reigning king. Solomon assumed responsibility and took decisive action not only for the good of the kingdom but also for the good of David’s household.

But sadly, Adonijah didn’t stay quiet for long. Remember, what Adonijah needed most—what our children need most, what we all need most is not behavior modification, but a changed heart.

In 1 Kings chapter two, we learn that although King Solomon appears to have confined Adonijah to his house, his heart remained unchanged. He was still conspiring to fulfill his evil and selfish desires. As a result, Solomon, had Adonijah put to death, along with the other co-conspirators.

“There is a classic story about a father who told his little four-year-old son to sit down, but the son didn’t sit down. So, the father said a second time, “Son, I said sit down.” The boy still didn’t sit down. Finally, the father took him by the shoulders and forcefully placed him in the chair. He said, “Now, Son, sit there!” The little boy answered, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside!” (Adrian Rogers).

How many of you know, intimidation, manipulation or incarceration will not ultimately change a person’s rebellious heart? Prisons are necessary in order to restrain the evil in a society. Receiving discipline and correction can bring a certain level of moral restraint to our lives. But true and lasting change can only come when Christ, who is our life, is reigning in our hearts.

When Christ takes up residence in us, which is true of every believer, we are enabled to wage war against the flesh. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Romans 8:13).

The problem with us sometimes is that, like David with Adonijah, we are often too passive when it comes to dealing with our sinful flesh. We spend more time on social media sites like Face Book than we do seeking God’s face in His book.

The flesh cannot be rehabilitated. It must be assassinated. Paul explained in Romans 13:14b, that we must not make any provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. We must cut off sources of temptation out of our lives and avoid compromising people, places and positions, even if it costs us.

Now let me be clear, victory over the rival to the throne of our hearts is not **achieved** through self-effort. Rather it's **received** through our identification and dependence upon Christ who lives in every believer. We cannot put to death our sinful desires ourselves—we cannot crucify ourselves. But we must be willing to be crucified or be willing to be made willing.

As the Apostle Paul also testified, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20).

In his book, *Not I but Christ*, Stephen Olford explained, “So many Christian today try to live the Christian life apart from Christ; but such human endeavors are doomed to failure. Jesus made that clear when He declared with categorical finality: “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The fact is, only one person ever lived the Christian life; it was Jesus, and He did so to the pleasure and glory of His Father (Luke 3:31-22; 9:28-35).

After effecting that eternal salvation through the blood of His cross and the power of His resurrection, He ascended to heaven to impart His life, through the Holy Spirit, to all who believe His gospel and receive His full salvation. So, the Christian life is nothing less than ‘the outliving of the indwelling Christ’ on the principle of dependent faith.”

Brothers and sisters, we are not only saved by faith in Christ alone, we also live the Christian life by faith in Christ alone who lives in the heart of every believer? Christ lives His life through us as we trust Him to reign in every area of our lives—as we yield and depend upon the Spirit.

For this reason, the Apostle Paul prayed to the Father this prayer on behalf of believers in Ephesus: *“that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”* (Ephesians 3:16-17).

If Christ already resides in every believer through the Spirit, why is Paul praying for believers to be strengthened on the inside so that Christ may 'dwell' in their hearts through faith? The word *dwell* in relation to Christ in the believer means a "settled residence" or to be at home. (Dr. Moule)

As Stephen Olford also explained, "The idea has a royal ring to it. The sovereign Christ must reign as 'Master resident in His proper home.' So Paul's longing for the saints at Ephesus was that Christ might be at home in their lives. With so many of us, Christ is in the house, but He's not 'at home.' We still have doors marked 'Strictly Private.'"

Is Christ at home in your life—is He reigning in you as 'Master resident in His proper home?' Or are there some rooms marked private where Christ is not welcome? If this is the case, it's indicative that we don't fully know the love of God nor do we have the faith to trust Him to run our lives better than we can.

Consequently, we will not fully know the power of the living Christ at work in us putting self to death so that we might be the change agents we are called to be in our homes, in our church and in our world.

Now if you recall, part of what contributed to Adonijah's self-rule was that he did not have an intimate relationship with his father David.

But can I tell you, although you may or might not have an intimate relationship with your earthly father, you can have intimacy with our Heavenly Father who gave His beloved Son to make it possible. If you're saved, He already resides in you. The question now is, are you trusting Him to reign in every room of your life and making time to grow your faith and intimacy with God.

And how many of you know, you don't have to bang on God's door to know His heart and grow to trust Him without reservation. He's knocking on your door. He's waiting for you.

And if you willingly open the door, if you make time daily to commune with the Lord in prayer, in the word and in community with other

believers, He will reveal His transforming glory to you. And if you open those rooms in your life where you've been doing your own thing, and invite Him to take control, He will do in you what you could never do for yourself.

God is not a passive Father. Unlike David, who was unwilling to displease Adonijah through loving and corrective discipline, our Heavenly Father will make us uncomfortable if need be. He loves us too much to leave us in a place where we shouldn't be. If need be, He will shake up our lives so that we might have ears to hear His guiding voice, and get back to the place where we can experience His royal power and presence in our lives.

The victorious life is the victorious Lord living in you and me in utter mastery (Stephen Olford).

Conclusion

Have you discovered the Christ-life for the self-life? If you've trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, then Christ has taken up residence in you. The question now is, is He a royal resident—is He at home in your heart?

There's a rival to the throne of your heart. Apart from the Spirit, we cannot put to death the self-life ourselves. But we must be willing to be crucified or be willing to be made willing.

May we daily seek to be renewed in the Father's love so that we would trust Christ to reign in us and live His life through us to the glory of His name.