

## Final Prayer

When we struggle to understand things, heavenly Father, break through the fog of our difficulties and enable us to perceive Your ways. Shine a light into our lives, and into our minds our feelings and our thoughts, so that we may begin to understand what You are saying to us about how to make things better. Heavenly Father, You are our one true Light: AMEN

## 2 Samuel 4:1-8

No: 8    Week: 158    Sunday    21/09/08

### Prayer

Your love for people, Lord God, is never ending, single minded, faithful, unconditional, eternal, purposeful, compassionate, steadfast, fearless and fruitful; and if that were not enough, Your love has been made known to us personally through Jesus Christ our Lord! We praise You, Lord God; King of the Universe and Master of Redemption. We praise You forever! AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: Preaching

*In this coming week we will pray about a number of issues to do with preaching and preachers in church. Pray today for any preachers personally known to you.*

#### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who entertain us in great sporting events*
- *Give thanks for scientists who work to find medical cures*
- *Pray for those who risk their lives to help keep international peace*

### Meditation

For those with open eyes to see the Father,  
For those who know the truth in Jesus Christ;

Salvation comes to all who own His name,  
and judgment falls on the rich who oppress the poor,

Blessings fall on those who strive for good,  
and curses fall on all who choose the evil paths,

Deliverance comes to all who trust in Him,  
and bondage holds all those who love their own ways,

The Kingdom grows where people do Your will,  
And justice comes when captives are set free;

Open our eyes to see Your Word Lord God  
Your love, Your works, Your plan for all humanity.

### Bible Study - 2 Samuel 4:1-8

<sup>1</sup> When Saul's son Ishbaal heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. <sup>2</sup> Saul's son had two captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab. They were sons of Rimmon a Benjaminite from Beeroth (for Beeroth is considered to belong to Benjamin; <sup>3</sup> Now the people of Beeroth had fled to Gittaim and are there as resident aliens to this day).

<sup>4</sup> Saul's son Jonathan had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled; and, in her haste to flee, it happened that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.

<sup>5</sup> Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ishbaal while he was taking his noonday rest. <sup>6</sup> They came inside the house as though to take wheat, and they struck him in the stomach; then Rechab and his brother Baanah escaped. <sup>7</sup> Now they had come into the house while he was lying on his couch in his bedchamber; they attacked him, killed him, and beheaded him. Then they took his head and travelled by way of the Arabah all night long. <sup>8</sup> They brought the head of Ishbaal to David at Hebron and said to the king, 'Here is the head of Ishbaal, son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; the LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring.'

## Review

Today's passage is yet another unsavoury story from the time when David was king of Judah and ruling from Hebron, but was not yet king over all Israel, including the northern tribes. In the battle in which Saul had died these tribes had lost much territory to the Philistines, and Saul's son Ishbaal (or Ishbosheth) was their king. He was a weak leader and had lost the support of his army commander, Abner; and unbeknown to him, Abner had been killed by Joab, David's right hand man (3:22-27), after attempting to seek reunification of the tribes of Israel under David. Ishbaal was left exposed and with little authority; but what was required now was firm leadership in order to tackle the situation. While Abner had been alive, his authority was enough to call the northern tribes together to take decisions and act. Now Abner was gone, there was a power vacuum, and into this rushed two young men who thought they could handle the situation perfectly well. In this tragic and unpleasant story, they murdered Ishbaal and presented David with what they thought he wanted; the death of his foes and the prospect of reunification.

The core of this is about two young Benjaminites from the town of Beeroth, named Baanah and Rechab, and they are described as captains of 'raiding bands' (4:2). This description makes it obvious that Ishbaal has little control over what was happening in the country. The territory of Benjamin was close to Judah, where David ruled, but without the experienced army commander Abner, there was little to hold together the vestiges of military might he inherited from his father Saul. Ishbaal was reduced to trying to govern the northern tribes of Israel with a few raiding bands; they were hardly a match for the Philistines who occupied much of his territory or for David who ruled in the south.

The two 'sons of Rimmon' must have perceived the situation clearly from their vantage point of living close to David's territory and yet being a part of Israel. Along with the previous army commander Abner, they must have seen that the only solution to Israel's political problems would be reunification with Judah under the authority of David, so they went about achieving this goal with zeal. They came on Ishbaal while he was taking an afternoon rest and killed him with the usual unpleasantness of the times, and his head was brought to David. David had taken the head of Goliath in celebration of victory over the Philistines in his youth, and these young men thought that David would now appreciate their efforts and reward them appropriately.

If you have followed this story through recent weeks, you will probably guess how David would react to such a turn of events. No war had been declared, and David did not appreciate the unilateral slaughter of his enemies. From his point of view it was an outrage similar to the dispatch of Saul by the young Amalekite (2 Sam 1), and David had them executed for murder against the family of Saul (2 Sam 4:9ff). The young men did not understand that David was attempting to find a peaceful solution to the unification of Israel and had already made several attempts to achieve this.

In the middle of this awful story there is one verse which appears to be out of place. Verse 4, tells us that although we may have thought that all of Saul's sons were now killed (Ishbaal on his bed and the others on the battle field – 1 Sam 31), this was not entirely true. In the panic of the defeat at Mount Gilboa and Jezreel, Saul's youngest son Mephibosheth had been rescued by his nurse but was accidentally dropped and became a cripple. This small story highlights the folly of the action of Baanah and Rechab who thought they had eliminated the last son of Saul, and secondly, it introduces the character of Mephibosheth who becomes an important person in David's court. We will discover that David is generous to Mephibosheth, and give him a permanent place at court as a reminder to all of his commitment to Saul and the fact that he had no role in the death of any member of Saul's family. For this reason, scripture says that David treated Mephibosheth with 'covenant loyalty' all his life, not so much because he was a cripple but because he was a son of Saul (see 2 Samuel 9).

David's way of working was to allow God to bring about His will of a united Kingdom, and judiciously either to act (as he had done before see 1 Samuel 30) or wait (as now) as the Lord's plans unfolded. David did not want to ferment civil war, as nearly happened when Joab murdered Abner, or take vengeance upon Saul's family. Whatever killing he was involved in as a 'warlord' and then as king of Judah, he would not sanction murder to achieve his personal aims of power. The way to achieve a united Kingdom, as far as David was concerned, was God's way, and a way of peace.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Have you read the story of Mephibosheth? Take the opportunity to read it in 2 Samuel 9, and see how it connects with today's passage.
2. What rewards do you think that the young men might have expected for bring the head of David's 'enemy' to him on a plate?
3. Is it easy is it to know when to act for the Lord and when to wait? How can we know the difference?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The first few chapters of 2 Samuel are full of slaughter and bloodshed. They are very hard to stomach knowing that the outcome is David's control of all Israel. However, if we read carefully, we can see that David did all in his power to act responsibly in what must have been the most difficult of times. We would not agree with many of his methods, but we do not live with the realities he had to handle. I often wonder how history will judge the way in which we go about our work for the Lord today. We do our best, but what will future generations make of what we have done?*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *How easy do you find it to read stories of death and murder in scripture? Do you watch television programmes that contain death and murder? How do we handle such things in a way that makes sense of our faith?*
- *Pray for those in authority who have the power of life and death in their hands as they direct armies to fight for good reasons or for ill. Pray for armed forces today who are employed to fight and kill, and pray about what such a mentality does to people who enlist.*