

David Mourns for Abner

Call to Worship: Psalm 112

1st Scripture: 2 Samuel 3:22-30

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 3:31-39

Hymn Insert- *You are my All in All*

Hymn #11 (Supp)- *My Savior's Love*

Hymn #178- *O Sacred Heart Now Wounded*

Introduction:

David and Abner had formulated their covenant, and Abner had gone out in peace, preparing to finalize the covenant between David and Israel, which would set David on the throne, to reign over all Israel. However, Joab, having just returned from a raid, was not present, when David and Abner had secured this agreement together. And when he had heard about it, he was upset, to say the least, for, he had still the strong desire to avenge the death of his brother Asahel, whom Abner had killed in the battle at Gibeon. And so, after rebuking David, and craftily suggesting that Abner was deceiving David, with the desire to learn about David's movements and plans, Joab, apart from David's knowledge, sought to take matters into his own hand. He sent messengers to Abner, seeking his return to Hebron, so as to discuss some supposed forgotten matters that David had not mentioned earlier. Abner did indeed return, but only to find himself slain by Joab, who, pretending to pull him aside for a private discussion, thrust him in the stomach with a knife, bringing about his end.

When David had found out, about what Joab had done, he was furious, to say the least. And after proclaiming the innocence of his kingdom and administration in the matter, he pronounced several strong curses against Joab and his father's house. For, in committing this wicked act, Joab showed little concern for David, for Israel, and for the life of Abner, whose blood was now upon the head of Joab and his house.

And furthermore, this act of Joab has placed David in a very difficult situation, as Abner had come to make and secure a peace treaty with David, after having gained the support of all Israel, to make David king. Abner had come on peaceful terms, and David had agreed to those terms, but now Abner had been murdered by Joab, the commander of David's army, at a time of peace and reconciliation. What would all of the tribes of Israel think, when they found out that their mediator was murdered by David's men? Is there even a remote chance that they would still make David king, after Joab had committed such a horrible and atrocious act? All David could do, is commit the matter to God, while responding to the whole situation in a way that

would most honor God. The results and consequences would have to be left in the hands of divine providence. And so, this morning, we come now upon the scene of mourning, as David prepares a proper burial for Abner, and it is here, right at the scene of David's sincere mourning for Abner, that God will expose the blessed heart of David, before all Israel. And in doing so, He will secure Israel's trust in David, in spite of the great evil that Joab had committed.

I. David Mourns for Abner

"Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, 'Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner'" (vs. 31a).

Here David, both genuinely sorrowful over the death of Abner, and angry with Joab, for his murderous and shameful act of rebellion, orders Joab and those who were with him, to clothe themselves with the attire of humility and mourning, so as to honor the now fallen Abner. In doing this, David not only brought them into, at least, an outward manifestation of how David felt about the matter, but furthermore, he was expressing his utter displeasure and disagreement with Joab's treacherous act of murder. David would honor Abner with a high and proper burial, indeed, a royal burial, recognized by the king himself, rather than allow Abner to be viewed as an enemy of any sort. And Joab and his men, would be forced to partake in this ceremony. Tearing one's clothes and putting on sackcloth, was a customary expression of humility and mourning, practiced especially within the Jewish culture.

"And King David followed the coffin" (vs. 31b).

For a king to be present at any funeral was very significant. Imagine the President of the United States attending the funeral of some individual. Certainly, that individual would have to have been highly decorated in some way; a heroic soldier, a former president, or someone of great nobility and importance in our society. More than likely, the President of the United States (whomever that may be at the time) will not be attending any of our funerals.

But to follow the coffin, emphasizes even further, the great honor and dignity that David wanted to put upon Abner. You will note, brethren, that this is the first time, we have seen David, labelled as "King David." Now, other recent texts, clearly spoke of David being made king, but the name, "King David," is mentioned first here. And my first impression of this matter is that David (who was probably not overly zealous to exalt himself in any respect), wanted that title, especially recognized here, for the sake and dignity of *Abner*, and not of

himself. It were as if the author, in line with what David would have wished, were saying, "Even the king himself, followed the coffin, so as to greatly honor Abner, far above the average man. In the face of such evil; in the light of a crime that shamefully took the life of a man, against all laws of decency; the king, cast his glory upon the victim, so as to compromise the great act of shame that had come upon him, in his murder." David was looking to honor Abner at his burial, so as to rectify the dishonor that accompanied him at his death. He cast, as it were, the royal robe upon his coffin, when he, the king of Israel, followed the coffin.

"So they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. And the king sang a lament over Abner and said: 'Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound nor your feet put into fetters; as a man falls before wicked men, so you fell.' Then all the people wept over him again" (vs. 32-34).

And so, they give Abner a high and proper burial, and as they stand before the coffin, the king weeps loudly, over Abner. Again brethren, it is times like this that we view something about the heart of David, that is just contrary to anything natural in the heart of fallen man. Abner has caused David a lot of grief. It could be very easy and natural to rejoice in his death, here. But David is a man after God's own heart, isn't he? David is a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, many years later, will weep loudly over the coming destruction of the rebellious nation of Israel, who had rejected him. David placed a high value on the human soul, and he also respected the greatness of Abner's ability and position, though hardly a praiseworthy virtue could be found within the man. Again, consider not only the king attending the funeral, but the king following the coffin, and not only following the coffin, but weeping loudly at the burial site, and preparing to offer up a song of lamentation. The people, witnessing the heavy heart of their king, are moved to tears as well.

And then, we are told that David sings a lamentation over Abner. And within this short stanza, we find a great summary of that which made Abner's death most lamentable to David. And, in essence, David highlights the fact that Abner's death was undeserved, rooted in an act of vengeful wickedness. He had committed no immediate crime. He was not arrested, brought to trial, and found guilty in a court of law. He was not cuffed at the wrists or bound at the feet, and cast in prison, as some thief or murderer. Rather, he died as one who dies by the hands of wicked men. It was a senseless, wicked act of murder, which pulled this great and well respected man, from out of the land of the living. And as the people ponder David's lamentation, they

begin to weep again. The reality of a life taken, in such an unjust fashion, hits home with the people, and so they mourn.

Similar to what we do in our own culture, following the early morning burial, the burial attendees customarily eat a meal together. But again, we find something glowing from the heart of David, further attesting to the sincerity of his grief and sorrow, over Abner. "And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, 'God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!'" (vs. 35)

In order to further emphasize the great injustice, surrounding Abner's death, and as a sincere expression of his grief, David refuses to eat the customary meal, following the burial. He will infringe upon cultural tradition, even as justice was grossly infringed upon, in Abner's death. And so, David vows not to eat so much as a morsel of bread until the sun goes down. And he brings forth this vow in a most severe way, saying, in essence, 'Let God bring evil upon me, and that, beyond what I could even imagine in my own mind,' if I eat anything at all until the sun goes down.' David's mourning was not conjured up, and in fact, it would carry over, beyond the traditional post-burial meal. And this affliction of his own natural desires; this expression of mourning, along with all else he has done, greatly impresses the people. And as word regarding this matter, travels all around, God magnifies the heart of David, in such a way, that he wins the respect of all Israel, to an extent that would carry him beyond the original favor, he had obtained through the mediation of Abner. God overcomes the hindrance of Joab's gross sin, by allowing the sincere expression of David's heart, to further gain the respect of all the people.

"Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, since whatever the king did pleased all the people" (vs. 36). Indeed, the people saw in David, a quality of heart that could nowhere be found in Saul, or in any of the heathen kings for that matter! Such a man would not be a raging tyrant, who carelessly wielded his authority against his subjects. But such a man, who could greatly mourn, even over a former enemy, and to this extent, is a king to be coveted! Rather than seeing David's mourning and weeping as a sign of weakness, or as a lack of true masculinity, the people saw it as an outward display of a tender and compassionate heart, that would truly concern himself with the state and welfare of his subjects! The people saw, the people wept, and the people took note of it, and they spread it all around. And what is the result? How does God use David's faithful and tender heart, in this context?

"For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's intent to kill Abner the son of Ner." God uses the redeemed heart of His glorious new creation in Christ, to overcome the present dilemma, which Joab had created by his wicked actions. Now, all of Israel knew that David had nothing to do with the murder of Abner. David's humble and sincere response, pleased all of the people.

"Then the king said to his servants, 'Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?' Why do I mourn so severely? Why do I not eat at the table? For a prince (Saul's cousin and the commander of the army of Israel) and a great man (a strong and decorated soldier) has fallen this day in Israel. Someone very important; someone who will be missed; someone who will leave a hole in Israel's arsenal, has died!" Again, if you want to touch upon the "man after God's own heart," here, you will recall that this rings with some similarity to the much more lengthy lamentation that David had written for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17ff). David expressed some of the greatest forms of lamentation, and David wept in some of the most profound ways...over those who would have been recognized as his enemies! You want to find the heart of God, brethren? You want to discover the heart of Christ in David? Begin, by searching these deep wells of compassion, directed most wondrously at the heart of those who harm without cause, of those who selfishly offend, indeed, enemies! And though David, perhaps, could not say much about Abner's virtues or spiritual qualities, he did have respect for the man's office, and for his strength.

"And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah [David's sister], are too harsh for me" (vs. 39a).

Though David is the anointed king; though David is the one preparing to reign over all Israel, he is weak on this occasion; such a horrific crime and reality, has twisted his heart, and the sons of Zeruiah (Abishai, and especially Joab) stand in another class of their own; indeed a class that David cannot even identify with. They are too harsh for David. The man after God's own heart, cannot even identify with such men, who can blatantly murder a man, under such deceptive and cunning conditions, and that without a flicker of the conscience. David is in awe over a heart that can rush forward to take a man's life, with little or no concern, outside of the battlefield, during a time of peace. Upon hearing this, we might question why David did not have Joab and Abishai executed? Perhaps, Joab was presently, somewhat untouchable, being a commander of the army? Perhaps, David's lack of strength, as of yet, in reigning over all Israel,

contributed to this dilemma? It is certainly not to say that David was afraid to execute the death penalty. He has already done that with the Amalekite messenger, and he will do that again in the next chapter. And furthermore, on the battlefield, David was a mighty man of war. However, there were times, when David backed away from taking such action, and such non-action may be questionable, at the least (Ex: later when his son Amnon, rapes his sister Tamar).

Needless to say, he does commit the retribution here, to God: "The Lord shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness" (vs. 39b). And indeed, God will, even as He has done with Saul, and with Abner for that matter...all in due time!

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Let us be careful, brethren, not to foster and cultivate a heart within us, which becomes casual or careless toward violence and acts of injustice. I mentioned this, in part, when addressing the matter of abortion (a few weeks ago), and how numb we can be, to all of the gross murdering and killing that is taking place in our own back yard, at the local abortion mills. But here, I want to bring that into more of a general realm, as well.

We live in a culture that loves to view and behold violence. We are not too far off from those who applauded the goring and pummeling of men and animals, back when the Roman Coliseum was in use, in times past. However, due to advanced technology, we can view the same level of gore, with the help of special effects, and thereby spare human lives. But the innate desire to behold violence, to laugh at it, to revel in it, to talk about it, and to find awe in it, is not of God, be sure of that. There is nothing godly about delighting in watching, or producing a chill, over seeing human bodies chopped to pieces, eye balls ripped out, bones being broken...etc. Now, understand, I am not saying that it is sin to watch and enjoy an action movie, where, although evil is present, the good guys ultimately deal with it, and etc. I am concerned more about the glorifying of gore and bloodshed, in our culture. The shedding of blood is no small matter to God, and it ought never to be glorified as a happy event. In fact, one of the horrors of the cross of Christ, was the great amount of bloodshed that took place there. Bloodshed, crime, injustice...such things ought not to excite our curiosities. Rather, they ought to soberly remind us of the travesty of man's fall, leading us to hunger all the more for glory!

Abner's death affected David...greatly! It grieved him. It stunned him! Not so much the gory aspect of it, but rather the *unjust* gory aspect of it. Indeed, if the innocent shedding of the

blood of bulls and goats and lambs, was meant to sober the Israelites; if the sacrificial system of animal bloodshed was meant to maintain a sensitivity toward the reality of sin's evil, as innocent animal blood was spilled, how much more ought we to tread reverently on the soil of human death? And so, let us be cautious with what we put before our eyes and our ears, especially when taken from a media outlet that is built and geared toward tickling the interests of a fallen and lost world. If you find yourself cheering for the bad guy, or clapping over heinous ways in which the notorious villain slays his victims, you might want to consider God's heart in the matter, and repent accordingly.

2) Notice that true masculinity; true manhood is not to be associated with the power of a man, but rather the *heart* of a man. Joab would easily be considered heroic by most in our society, would he not? He avenged the death of his brother, didn't he? Knowing what we know about Abner, if we are honest, again, in the movie scenario, we would be tempted to cheer at Abner's defeat. Joab is the vigilante; the "Punisher"; the avenger of his day. But friends, note, in God's eyes, he hardly scratched the surface of *true* manhood. You see, if we want to be men, brothers, we have to begin by considering God's intention for manhood. And we get a glimpse of that in David, indeed, an imperfect glimpse, but a glimpse nonetheless, and certainly a full fledged view in Christ.

Now manhood does not mean casting away all aggression, does it? David was very aggressive at times, wasn't he? Isn't David the one who broke the skull of the Giant Goliath, with a sling and a stone, and then cut off his head, and carried it back to his people? Isn't David the one who was mighty in battle, who killed and cut off the foreskins of two hundred Philistines; isn't David, the mighty warrior, who had so much "just" blood on his hands, that God would not allow him to build the temple, rather putting that responsibility on his son, Solomon? Indeed, David was aggressive, at times...in war, and in seeking justice for the people of God. David will stretch Israel's borders to great distances, by conquering the enemies of the Lord, in the chapters up ahead.

But David also had a tender and compassionate heart, even toward those who sought his demise, didn't he? David wept over Saul and Abner, didn't he, though they caused him great harm, and hindered him often? You see, David had a tender and gracious heart, and while he fought hard against the enemies of the Lord, he also uniquely concerned himself with those who opposed him. He did not have a "revenge" mindset. There was a place for war, but there was

also a place for compassion and peace seeking, particularly toward those of his own nation. There is a proper balance there, isn't there?

And isn't that the case with Christ, who is both the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah," and the "Lamb of God." Indeed, our Lord will ultimately destroy all who reject His reign, but He is beyond gracious toward those who repent of their rebellion now, and flee to Him for grace! And so, brethren, let us be aggressive and not flimsy, when dealing with our sin, but let us be ever so tender and gracious toward dying sinners, who desperately need the grace that is found in Christ Jesus. It was not David's aggressive heart, which won the respect of his people, was it? It was his compassionate and tender heart, which God used unto that end. That was the true masculinity, which moved the people. And such a king, is a coveted blessing to his subjects (unlike Rehoboam). And, is that not what compels us to support and long for, the visible reign of Christ? He is a holy and just King, who genuinely loves and cares for His people...proven already, by the fact that He died for them! [Give the Gospel here???)

3) Finally, brethren, see again, the heart of Christ, here reflected in the heart of David. Abner had revolted against David, and set up Ishbosheth as king. Abner was a self-serving, wicked man, who concerned himself, solely, with himself. Abner is "us," in our fallen and unregenerate state, is he not? And consider the great glory, which David cast upon the man, who had so rebelled against him. Brethren, we, like Abner (only in a spiritual sense), were rebellious, wicked, self-serving, dead and in the coffin. And while we had nothing whatsoever to merit His attention at all, let alone His great love and mercy, Christ, our King, followed our casket, as it were, and thrust His glory upon us. He gave us worth and value, didn't He? We were slain, not by Joab, but by the shame and guilt of our own sins. But the King of Glory has come to us, having died for us, having secured our salvation in His death and resurrection; He has come to associate Himself and His glory with us, as if it were our own! Only, we don't remain in the coffin, do we? We are raised anew already, and we will be raised complete in glory! At our deaths, brethren, angels will usher us into the presence of King Jesus! Us, wretched, naturally dead sinners, treated like royalty, in the presence of the angels and all in heaven...and all of this, is no thanks to us! Oh brethren, walk worthy of that! Walk worthy of that! And let us never, ever, for a moment, think that our associating with Christ, in a world that rejects Christ, somehow provides Him with a blessing or an advantage or some benefit! We are the sole beneficiaries here, brethren! Let us make a big deal of His grace, and of *His* associating with *us*!

AMEN

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25