

A New Contention Arises

Call to Worship: Psalm 93

1st Scripture: 2 Samuel 19:9-15

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 19:40-43

Hymn Insert- *Majesty*

Hymn Insert- *Come People of the Risen King*

Hymn Insert- *Our God Reigns*

Introduction:

Following the defeat of Absalom, David has begun to make his way back to Jerusalem. Along the way, we have considered some of the recorded interactions, which have taken place, between David and a few different men. We left off with the faithful Barzillai, accompanying David across the Jordan River, before returning to his own home in Rogelim. In Barzillai's place, Chimham would accompany David back to Jerusalem.

This morning, we follow David into Gilgal (now on the west side of the Jordan), where he will be met by a large group of Israelites, before proceeding on, into Jerusalem. And here, a new contention will develop, adding further weight to the back of an already weary and burdened David.

I. The Set-Up (vs. 9-15)

Before we can understand and appreciate the full weight of that which takes place in our main text, we must spend time, looking back at something that had happened a little earlier, when David was back in Mahanaim, following the defeat and death of Absalom.

You might recall there, that following the death of Absalom, there was a dispute amongst the Israelite tribes, concerning what to do, now that Absalom, the presumed king, was dead. And after wrestling through the matter, they had agreed that it would be right and best, to bring David back, to reign over them, from Jerusalem. And so, they sent word to David, asking him to come back to be their king.

However, probably due to their shame, as being those most responsible for the rebellion that had taken place under Absalom, Judah alone, had not sent word to David. And so, David, seeking to secure peace in Israel, sent word to his kinsmen tribe, alleviating their fears concerning any vengeance he might seek to exact against them, and called them to receive him

back as their king, without fear. Motivated by David's kind, merciful and gracious spirit, Judah then sent word to David, calling him to return, as well. David then left Mahanaim and headed south and west to the Jordan River, so as to return to Jerusalem. And the people of Judah went out to meet David, so as to escort him back into Jerusalem.

So far, so good, only, the northern tribes of Israel took this as a slap in the face, because David and the people of Judah, failed to include them in the celebratory return of the king, even though they themselves also owned David as their king, and were first, before Judah, in seeking the king's return. In other words, David and Judah, should have invited the other tribes to take part in the process, of escorting the king back to Jerusalem. Not doing so, made the other tribes feel insignificant, as if they had no part in the king, as well. This then brings us to the contention, which erupts at Gilgal, in our main text.

II. The Contention (vs. 40-43)

And so, David arrives at Gilgal, and we are told in verse 40 that all of Judah and half of Israel were with him there. More than likely, those from Israel who were already with David, were the thousand men of Benjamin, who had come with Shimei, and whoever had joined David at Mahanaim, prior to the war with Absalom (Gill points out that the word used for "half" here, is actually meant to signify the idea of "part," as opposed to the whole, which prepares us for the contention that is about to arise in the next verse).

And so, in verse 41, we are then told, "Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, 'Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David's men with him across the Jordan.'" Clearly, the language used by the Israelites is very harsh and accusative, to the extent that they are judging the motives of the men of Judah, to be self-seeking and full of deceit. "Why have the men of Judah *stolen* you away?" "Why have they come to hog you for themselves, seeking to exclude us from the privilege of escorting you back into the land." Again, very clearly, their accusation is meant to imply ill motive and deception.

Naturally, this provokes a response on the part of the men of Judah. In verse 42, we are told, "So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, 'Because the king is a close relative of

ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?"

"Look, the king is one of our natural kinsmen. He is from our Judean lineage. Isn't it proper that we came to get him, and to bring him back? Why would you be angry over this? And furthermore, what personal benefit have we ever received from the king, that we would be trying to do this for some matter of personal gain, in the present? Has the king ever favored us in any way, with food or gifts? Have we ever been treated any differently than you, such that your suspicion is warranted in any sense? In what way have we ever sought to manipulate the king unto gaining his favor, and by what tangible means, has partiality ever been shown us, indicating that we have succeeded to this end?"

And then, in verse 43, we are told that the men of Israel respond, by saying, "We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you. Why then do you despise us-- were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?"

"Look, you may be related to the king by natural descent, but he is the king over all Israel. And to that end, we have ten shares in him, as opposed to your one share (Simeon was part of Judah). This being the case, we have more right to David than you do, and so, why did you despise us (look down on us, and treat us as insignificant) by not including us in bringing the king back? And furthermore, weren't we the first ones to send for the king, advising to bring him back? How then could you swoop in, and steal him back for yourselves, without including us?"

Finally, we are told that the words of Judah were fiercer (stronger, harsher, more weightier) than the words of the men of Israel, and this leads to the rebellion that is described in chapter 20. Clearly, the contention is not resolved, and ultimately, the very peace, into which David had invested much of his own humiliation and mercy, was breached, leading to further disunity, schism and war.

III. An Examination of Both Sides of the Contention

Rather than moving into chapter 20, to consider the rebellion that erupts, let us stop here for this morning, to examine the root, as I believe there is much spiritual benefit that we can gain from such an examination. And this examination will inevitably produce significant

applications, which we can profit from, as we seek to walk in unity as a church, and in peace with all men, unto the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Let us then consider the root of this controversy, from three different angles. First, the Judah angle, then the Israelite angle, and finally the Davidic angle.

1) The Judah Angle: Could the men of Judah have done things differently, so as to avoid sparking this controversy? Certainly, at the least, had they contacted the other ten tribes, before going to get David, none of this would have happened. And so, ideally, they ought to have remembered that David's throne served a broader territory than Judah alone. Remembering this, not only would have kept the peace, but furthermore, it could have fostered stronger relations with the other ten tribes, had they shown them the respect of bringing them on board from the beginning.

Application #1: It is amazing to consider, how simply thinking of others, and showing them due diligence and respect, will produce the very opposite effect of not doing so. Let us foster a constant, conscious awareness of others, brethren, affirming that others are important to us. This will go a long way in both, preventing schism and solidifying and strengthening unity.

That said, we are all human, and sometimes we just forget or don't realize that we have given a perception of not being considerate of someone else. In the case of Judah, I don't believe that they were intentionally seeking to bypass the other tribes, considering them second class citizens or anything like that. Ideally, they should have considered the other tribes, before going to get David, but I don't believe that there was any malice or conscious intention to neglect to include them. More than likely, had they realized the offense that would come about; if they could go back in time, they probably would have contacted them first, and included them.

That said, the response of the Israelite men, is obviously harsh and judgmental, which we will consider in a few moments. But, recognizing the sensitivity of the matter, and seeing that, though unintentional, they did offend the other tribes, I wonder if the men of Judah could still not have done more, after the fact, to quell the growing fire. Although David was from their own tribe, and although they had no malicious intent, attempting to secure some kind of personal gain or advantage, they probably could have absorbed Israel's first blow, and gently dealt with them, confessing their oversight in the matter, and asking for their forgiveness.

Application #2: Let us learn here, brethren, that even when we are wrongly accused, or overly accused, that it would be better to absorb the barb, and strive to preserve unity, as opposed to putting up a strong defense. Bringing out David's physical connection to Judah here, was not helpful, in alleviating the obvious tension. Perhaps, a gentle acknowledgement of non-malicious wrong, coupled with an apology, could have easily put out the fire, and secured the unity of the spirit. They ought to have learned this lesson from David, who had absorbed much, in forgiving the offense of His people, so as to maintain the peace. And we ought to learn from our Lord Jesus Christ, who has absorbed far more, in forgiving us, so as to bring us eternal peace with God. Let that lowliness of mind, which was in Christ, be in us, so that we might esteem one another as better than ourselves, and learn to bear patiently with one another's faults and offenses, in love. Being right is not the priority. Honoring God, and edifying one another; filling the breaches for the sake of glorifying Christ in our unity, is the priority.

Let us then move on to consider the Israelite angle.

2) The Israelite Angle: Did the men of Israel have a legitimate complaint, concerning Judah's neglect to contact them, and to include them in the process of bringing back the king. I believe so. Could we be sympathetic to the offense they had felt? Certainly. However, what ought to have been a legitimate concern and a forgivable offense, at best, turned into anger and jealousy, leading them to approach their brothers in a very harsh and judgmental way. Accusing the men of Judah of "stealing the king away" in a stealthy and intentional fashion, was certainly not giving them the benefit of the doubt. And this accusation certainly did nothing to foster a spirit of preserving the unity of the nation, under David. The approach was harsh and provocative, giving the men of Judah, no legitimate chance to explain themselves, or to own and confess their neglect, unto being restored to their offended brethren. There was no restorative mindset preserved within the hearts of the men of Israel.

Application #3: And so, brethren, let us, yet again, be reminded here of the wrong and right ways of dealing with offenses. When we seek to approach the brethren, concerning an offense, before approaching them, let us bring our own hearts before God, to ensure that our intentions and motivations are pure, and that a root of bitterness or jealousy or pride has not sprung up within us, which would lead us to be overly judgmental, rather than coming in love,

preparing to believe the best about our brethren. Let us come redemptively and restoratively, desirous first and foremost to procure reconciliation, and to remove whatever wedge has set in, because of the offense. Imagine, if the Israelites came with this mindset, bringing forth a legitimate concern, based upon a legitimate offense, but with the right heart, seeking to graciously correct their brethren, unto restoration and healing. But, instead, they come out swinging, thinking the worst, and leveling a harsh accusation (of malice) against their brethren. And this only stirs up strife, and fuels a great fire. Clearly, the Israelites ultimate concern here, had little to do with the glory of God, and much to do with their own self-idolatry.

This applies to their second response as well, when they accuse the men of Judah of despising them, because of their failure to consider how many shares the Israelites had in the king, and that the Israelites were first to call for the king to return. Clearly, it has become a competition at this point. And brethren, is that not one of the sad evidences of self-glorification and pride, when a contention gets to the point that we are fighting over who is better in some way or another? At that point in the disagreement, the righteousness of Christ is torn off, and suddenly we are the better saints than our opponents. Again, the big picture is lost, and the unity, which glorifies and magnifies Christ, goes out the window with it. At such times, we must ask ourselves, "Who and what is this all about?" Is it, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Peter," or "I" am of anything? Or, is it, "I am nothing, and it is all about Christ, who loved me, in my worst possible condition, and gave Himself for me?"

Before we close, by considering the Davidic angle, brethren, consider this general principle, to be taken from the two angles, which we have just examined: At the root of this contention, which blows up, once an ungodly man takes advantage of it, we find pride, jealousy, and ultimately a lack of concern for the glory of God and the peace of His people; the very things, which David himself was pursuing. All in all, it is idolatry. Let it be a pursuit of the glory of Christ, which continually drives us; that, which we continually, consciously strive after and refuel by our devotional life and our constant drinking from the means of grace, so that, we will be well equipped, to ask in all circumstances, especially those which center upon controversy, offense and contention, "How can I promote peace, unity and edification, unto the glory of Christ, right here, right now, in this context?"

3) The Davidic Angle: Interestingly enough, our text tells us nothing of David's response to the initial contention that erupts here. That does not mean that he was absolutely silent, but he seems to be uncomfortably sandwiched, right in the middle of the whole ordeal. And, here is the irony: Both sides, which have grossly betrayed and rebelled against David, and which David has graciously forgiven, are now fighting over, who is more loyal to the king. And unlike David, who was willing to absorb all wrongs, from both sides, so as to reestablish unity and peace among the people of God, neither Judah nor Israel, were willing to follow his example of humility, for the sake of the greater cause in all Israel. In other words, the same selfish, ungodly drive, which led them to support Absalom and betray David, was at work right here, as they were unwilling to consider the unity of the nation, unto the glory of God, in their so-called fervent desire to show themselves loyal to David. The irony and hypocrisy are beyond profound. Had either side really cared about their king, they would have adopted and embraced the overall desire of the king, which was to secure unity and peace, in all of Israel, unto the glory of God... even to their own personal hurt, in absorbing the wrongs of the other. In other words, their careless treatment of one another, actually confirmed their lack of true loyalty to the king, who did all for their unity and peace. Now brethren, this brings us to our final application, to be taken from this Davidic angle:

Application #4: Brethren, what was the primary emphasis of our Lord Jesus Christ's farewell discourse to his disciples, and his prayer to the Father, given in the latter chapters of John's Gospel? Was it not love for, and unity among the brethren? Was not our Lord's new and great commandment, for the brethren to love one another, as He has loved us? And how much wrong did He absorb, to procure that unity? Did He not deal with the power and consequence of sin in us, by His own sacrifice on the cross, so that we could violently and fervently pursue His ends? And when we bicker about how we've been hurt or offended; when we are so quick to disrupt unity, because of personal offenses, claiming that it is our zeal unto Christ, which motivates our actions, are we not like the men of Israel and Judah here, only worse, who actually used David, for their own personal pursuits of sustaining their pride or feeding their jealousy? Is it a true love for David, to erode away, the very unity, which he had sought to secure, by bearing the rebellious blows of his people, and embracing humiliation? Is it a true love for Christ, which

would be willing to erode away the very unity, which He has secured, by bearing the consequences of His rebellious people, and embracing humility? The Son of God did this for us, brethren!

And so, let us be careful to examine our own hearts and our own motives, in all of our movements in life, and especially within the church, the body of Christ, examining whether or not our professed love to Christ, walks and talks the life and burden of Christ! Let the utter hypocrisy of Israel be seen and recognized as a hypocrisy that is common to all, fallen, human beings, even to those, who make up the visible, yet to be wholly sanctified church. Let our loyalty to Christ, be confirmed by our actions, and not merely with the wind that comes out of our lips.

Amen!!!

Benediction: Romans 16:25-27