

“Petty Bickering”
2 Samuel 19:40-43
(Preached at Trinity, January 19, 2020)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. David crushed the insurrection of Absalom and began his return to Jerusalem. It was a great period of uncertainty. It would require wisdom and finesse. Multitudes had followed Absalom. David would need to quickly reestablish his reign.
2. After the battle had ended everyone fled to their homes.
2 Samuel 18:17 NAU - "They took Absalom and cast him into a deep pit in the forest and erected over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled, each to his tent."
2 Samuel 19:8 NAU - "Now Israel had fled, each to his tent."
3. David had two options.
 - A. Having been victorious over Absalom, he could have marched into Jerusalem, taken military control of the city, and crushed any remaining opposition.
 - B. He could graciously wait until he is invited back. David takes this option. He was first received by the ten tribes. Israel was first to receive David back as king. His own tribe of Judah, however, held back.
David then turns to Judah.
2 Samuel 19:11-12 NAU - "Speak to the elders of Judah, saying, 'Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house, since the word of all Israel has come to the king, *even* to his house?' ¹² 'You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?'"
4. Finally, with great joy David crosses over the Jordan and is escorted to Gilgal and is reinstated as Israel's king.
2 Samuel 19:39-40 NAU - "All the people crossed over the Jordan and the king crossed too. The king then kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his place. ⁴⁰ Now the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him; and all the people of Judah and also half the people of Israel accompanied the king."
5. Peace and unity, however, are elusive. About the time we feel we can relax a new dispute arises. Pastors know this well and never take peace for granted. We have to labor for unity and pray for unity. Paul instructs the Ephesian church:
Ephesians 4:1-6 NAU - "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

6. David soon discovers his own peace will be short-lived and shattered. Before he even arrived back at Jerusalem a new division was brewing that was even more dangerous than the revolt of Absalom. It begins with some petty bickering among the tribes.
2 Samuel 19:41 NAU - "And behold, all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, "Why had our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away, and brought the king and his household and all David's men with him over the Jordan?"
7. The narrator seems to distinguish between the "people" in general and the officials which he refers to as the "men" of Israel and the "men" of Judah.
 There is strife that has developed between the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah. David is from Judah and Israel feels slighted in the return of David. It seems like a petty and prideful bickering.
- a. It can be likened to getting your feelings hurt because you weren't asked to carve the turkey at Thanksgiving. Or you weren't asked to do this or that at church. It is petty bickering.
 - b. But we shouldn't dismiss the power of petty bickering. This strife had the potential of threatening the future of the nation.
 "Why have the men of Judah stolen you away?"
8. Still, what we are seeing is the petty jealousy of Israel. They are offended that Judah might be receiving preferential treatment from David. And they are jealous that they didn't have a greater role in escorting David across the Jordan.
 Isn't that exactly like the human heart? Are you able to discern it in your own heart? It is one thing for two siblings to bicker over a toy or over the countless petty offences that can take place in the back seat of the car. It is another for adults to engage in the same behavior.
- I. Pride and a self-centered heart are behind almost all human strife.
- A. The narrator doesn't give us a response from David. Instead, we hear the response of the men of Judah.
 1. Their response displays their prideful heart. They are no different from their brethren from the North. They are outraged at the insinuations of Israel. Their feelings have been hurt.
2 Samuel 19:42 NAU - "Then all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king is a close relative to us. Why then are you angry about this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's *expense*, or has anything been taken for us?"
 2. Rather than appeasing their brothers they further enflamed the situation. Instead of listening patiently, Judah immediately became defensive. In fact, the narrator notes that their words were "harsher." The word literally means "fierce" or "severe."
 Solomon was wise in his counsel:
Proverbs 15:1 NAU - "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."
 3. Israel then fires back
2 Samuel 19:43 NAU - "We have ten parts in the king, therefore we also have more *claim* on David than you. Why then did you treat us with contempt? Was it not our advice first to bring back our king?"

- B. Pride destroys unity and divides brethren
1. It causes nations to go to war. It destroys marriages and divides families. And this sinful pride has divided and destroyed countless churches.
 2. Cyril Barber writes: “Pride spawns discontent, ingratitude, presumption, passion (or envy), hatred, wilfulness, and divisiveness.”¹
 3. There is no human relationship left untouched
 4. It destroys the peace so important to the church. It causes the division that God despises.
 5. **Chapter 19** ends without reconciliation. The narrator merely tells us which side had the stronger argument. Peace is not achieved by jockeying back and forth trying to out-manuever the other side. Peace is most often achieved by a willingness to humble yourself in submission.
- II. Pride displays itself in many ways
- A. Pride displays itself in selfishness
1. Israel was only focused on self-interests – “They stole you away” implying they had a higher claim to the king. In their pride they couldn’t rejoice that David had returned. Their only concern was that they have a part in his return.
 2. But this was also true of Judah – “He is our relative” implying they had a higher claim upon the king.
 3. Neither side was willing to admit to any culpability for the division between the tribes. Both sides would have insisted that they were in the right. This is the usual situation between two parties experiencing strife. Both most often feel they are in the right. Satan is the only winner.
 4. The truth is both sides were wrong.
 - a. Israel was wrong for having their feelings so easily offended. It is a high virtue to be slow to take offense.
James 1:19-20 NAU - "*This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*"
 - b. Judah was wrong not to include Israel in restoring David. They were lacking in graciousness. But there is no indication they set out with ill-intent towards their Israelite brothers.
- B. Pride is displayed in envy and jealousy
1. Both Israel and Judah were envious of one another along with the sister sin of jealousy.
 2. Pride doesn’t want others to have what we cannot have. We are not pleased that someone else might receive greater recognition or higher praise.

¹ Cyril J. Barber, *The Books of Samuel: The Sovereignty of God Illustrated in the Life of David*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), Two:297.

- C. Sometimes pride hides feelings of superiority -
 "Because the king is a close relative to us."
 "We have ten parts in the king, therefore we also have more *claim* on David than you."
1. The sad thing is both sides showed their great inferiority, as they were unwilling to be instruments of peace.
 2. How easily the dispute might have been put to rest if one or the other side would have simply responded with humility and grace.

III. Pride hides deep within the heart

- A. Many fail to recognize its presence.
- Jeremiah 49:16 NAU** - "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, O you who live in the clefts of the rock, Who occupy the height of the hill. Though you make your nest as high as an eagle's, I will bring you down from there," declares the LORD."
- Jeremiah 17:9 NAU** - "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"
1. Because pride is so subtle it can consume the heart while the person is convinced he is noble. Israel presumed to be motivated by a desire to give honor to the king.
 - a. What could be better for a nation than for everyone to be contending over who loves the king more?
 - b. This was not their true motive at all. They were actually more motivated by their own selfish pride, and this would sow seeds of destruction.
 2. Pride can rage into an inferno consuming everything in its path. A single person, unhappy and dissatisfied, can sow seeds of discord that can enflame the entire community – be it church or even nation. We'll see this with Sheba in the next chapter.
 3. If we see the world through the lens of self then the thing of greatest importance will be that which is to our benefit. If we see the world through the lens of Christ, then everything will be focused upon Him. Only then are we truly Christ-centered.
 4. When we fail to manifest Christ-like humility we can only expect division and strife. Brethren will divide over petty issues and unity destroyed.
- B. Most agree it will be the last sin to be conquered.
1. This is because our flesh seeks to reign supreme. Humility demands putting the flesh to death. But the mortification of the flesh is a grueling process.
 2. William Blaikie – "The settlement of quarrels is the very last matter to which Christ's followers learn to apply the example and instructions of their Master. When men begin in earnest to follow Christ they abandon some of the more frivolous ways of the world. But alas! When they fall into differences, they are prone in dealing with them to leave all Christ's precepts behind them. See in what an unlovely and unloving spirit the controversies of Christians have usually been conducted; how much of bitterness and personal animosity they show, how little forbearance and

generosity; how readily they seem to abandon themselves to the impulses of their own hearts.”²

3. How few we are to apply the words of our Lord,
Matthew 5:38-41 NAU - "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹ "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two."
4. Richard Phillips adds: “Although the New Testament urges Christians to bear ‘with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ this is one of the rarest and correspondingly most precious impulses among Christians in the church.”³

Conclusion:

1. The high character of Christianity is humility. The high charge of Christianity is forbearance and peace; a willingness to seek peace. This is the mind of Christ.
2. Strife is counter to the Christian imperative. We must guard our heart carefully.

² William Garden Blaikie, *Expository Lectures on the Book of 2 Samuel*. (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), page 316.

³ Richard Phillips, *2 Samuel, Reformed Expository Commentary*. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2018), Page 351.

