

The Life of David

David and Ish-bosheth

2 Samuel 4:1-12

Rev. Freddy Fritz

March 1, 2020

David and Ish-bosheth

Scripture

After the death of King Saul (1:1), David was anointed as king over the tribe of Judah in the city of Hebron (2:4). Saul's surviving son, Ish-bosheth, was set up as a puppet king over "all Israel" in the north by Abner, Saul's military general who had survived the battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (2:8-9). General Abner and David's commanding general, Joab, had tried to resolve the situation between the two sides (2:12-32). Unfortunately, their solution did not work, and this led to war (2:17), "a long war" (3:1), between the two sides. On the first day of the battle, Abner killed Joab's brother, Asahel (2:23). It is clear that Abner did not want to kill Asahel, but Asahel would not stop pursuing Abner, and so Abner reluctantly killed Asahel on the battle field.

After about seven and a half years (2:11), there was a falling out between Ish-bosheth and Abner (3:6-11). Abner decided to transfer his allegiance to David in Hebron, with the promise that he would bring all Israel with him over to David (3:12-21). Remarkably, David met with Abner, enjoyed a feast with him, and sent him back to Israel "in peace" (3:21). David was seeking to establish God's kingdom of peace on earth.

However, David's general, Joab, was not present when all of this occurred. He was not at all happy to hear what David had done. In fact, he deceptively called for Abner to return to Hebron, and then he murdered Abner in cold blood.

Today's lesson picks up when Ish-bosheth hears the news of Abner's death, and what happens to Ish-bosheth after that.

Let's read about David and Ish-bosheth in 2 Samuel 4:1-12:

¹When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had

died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. ²Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon a man of Benjamin from Beeroth (for Beeroth also is counted part of Benjamin; ³the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been sojourners there to this day).

⁴Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

⁵Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-bosheth as he was taking his noonday rest. ⁶And they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. ⁷When they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him. They took his head and went by the way of the Arabah all night, ⁸and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the 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." ⁹But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, ¹⁰when one told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. ¹¹How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth?" ¹²And David commanded his young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron. (2 Samuel 4:1-12)

Introduction

A young father in a supermarket was pushing a shopping cart with his little son, who was strapped in the front. The little boy was fussing, irritable, and crying. The other shoppers gave the pair a wide berth because the child would pull cans off the shelf and throw them out of the cart. The father seemed to be very calm; as he continued down each aisle, he murmured gently: “Easy now, Donald. Keep calm, Donald. Steady, boy. It’s all right, Donald.”

A mother who was passing by was greatly impressed by this young father’s patient attitude. She said, “You certainly know how to talk to an upset child—quietly and gently.”

And then bending down to the little boy, she said kindly, “What seems to be the trouble, Donald?”

“Oh no,” said the father. “He’s Henry. I’m Donald.”¹

Many people are not like the father, Donald. They get impatient and act in ways that are frequently bad. Sometimes, people even try to order their lives or community through unjust means.

That is what happened after Abner was murdered and the news reached King Ish-bosheth and the people of Israel in the north. Two men, Baanah and Rechab, sons of Rimmon, sought to establish the kingdom of David by killing Ish-bosheth, but they did so through unjust means.

Lesson

Second Samuel 4:1-12 shows us that injustice cannot establish God’s kingdom.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Courage Fails When We Ignore God (4:1)
2. God Will Fulfill His Purposes (4:2-4)

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2005/november/16217.html>.

3. Poor Theology Does Not Cover Sin (4:5-8)
4. God's Saving Work Leads to Gratitude (4:9)
5. God's Judgment Rests on Sinners (4:10-12)

I. **Courage Fails When We Ignore God (4:1)**

First, courage fails when we ignore God.

Abner was King Saul's general of his army. Somehow, he survived the battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa where Saul and three of his sons died, including Jonathan, David's dearest friend. Abner ruled the northern part of kingdom, known as Israel, whereas David was anointed king over the southern part of kingdom, known as Judah. After about five years, Abner apparently installed Saul's surviving son, Ish-bosheth, as king over Israel. But, two years later, the two of them had a falling out, and Abner tried to bring Israel into submission to David. Unfortunately, Abner was killed by Joab, David's general of his army.

Ish-bosheth knew that God had chosen David to be the next king over Israel. So, by not acknowledging David's kingship when his father Saul died, Ish-bosheth was living in open disobedience and rebellion against God.

Undoubtedly, Ish-bosheth was aware of what Abner was doing when he went to talk with King David. I think that Ish-bosheth was anxiously waiting for the news of Abner's meeting with David. But, he was surprised to hear that Abner had been killed. Verse 1 says, **"When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed."**

Ish-bosheth had been ignoring God for years. He had been living against God's revealed will. He had been living in rebellion against God. Abner had propped Ish-bosheth up and kept him in power, feeble as that was. So, news of Abner's death caused Ish-bosheth's courage to fail. And not only Ish-bosheth, but **all Israel**

was dismayed.

Courage fails when we ignore God. Difficulties or trials or tragedies come into our lives, and the ones upon whom we might have been depending for help and strength are gone, we become dismayed. But when we trust in the Lord, we can have courage.

Joe Scriven was a missionary from Ireland to Canada, working among the Iroquois Indians. He was joined by his fiancée who was also from Ireland. Just before the wedding, she was killed in an ice accident. Joe buried her with his own hands, and a broken heart. A year later, in a letter to his mother, he reflected, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer.”²

Friend, don’t ignore God. Don’t live as if he is not sovereign over all things. Commit your life to him so that, regardless of your circumstances, you need not be discouraged.

II. God Will Fulfill His Purposes (4:2-4)

Second, God will fulfill his purposes.

The **author** of Second Samuel then tells us about **two men who were captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon a man of Benjamin from Beeroth (4:2)**. They are simply identified here, and then the author goes on to tell us in verse 4, **“Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.”**

When I read this verse in preparation for this sermon, I did

² Galaxie Software, *10,000 Sermon Illustrations* (Biblical Studies Press, 2002).

not understand why it was here in this narrative. It seemed out of place. However, commentators helped me understand that Saul's grandson, **Mephibosheth**, could have staked a claim to his grandfather's throne. However, **Mephibosheth**, who was now about twelve years old, was **lame**. It is possible that he could not even walk. The author of Second Samuel wanted his readers to understand that his injury prevented him from securing the throne.

Friends, God will fulfill his purposes. God's purpose was for David to succeed Saul as the king over Israel. Seven years earlier, when the news of Saul and Jonathan's deaths at the battle of Mount Gilboa was reported to the nation, Mephibosheth's **nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame**. God was sovereignly controlling even that event so that David would become king over Israel.

Even today, let us believe that God is fulfilling his purposes. God is establishing his kingdom all around the world. Yes, there are places where it seems like the church is regressing. But there are other places where the kingdom of God is exploding with growth. And in your personal life, nothing is outside of God's sovereign control. God is fulfilling his purposes in your life too.

III. Poor Theology Does Not Cover Sin (4:5-8)

Third, poor theology does not cover sin.

The author tells us that **“the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-bosheth as he was taking his noontime rest. And they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped”** (4:5-6). Then, following a Hebrew literary custom, the author repeated what he had just said, with added details, in verse 7a, **“When they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom,**

they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him.” At this point, we don’t yet know why **Rechab and Baanah** killed **Ish-bosheth**. This was simply a cold-blooded assassination.

We learn that the brothers travelled about 80 miles south-west—a journey of at least two days—and **brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron** (4:8a). When they met with David we learn why they killed Ish-bosheth. They said to King David in verse 8b, **“Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the 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.”** The brothers thought that they would help David establish his kingdom by killing a rival king. They may also have thought that their action would have procured them some reward or position in David’s administration. It was true that Saul saw David as an enemy. And it was also true that Saul sought David’s life. But, they were completely wrong theologically when they said that it was the Lord who had avenged David. They tried to justify their actions with theology. The problem was that their theology was not only poor theology, it was wrong theology.

This past week I received Peanuts cartoon strip from an elder. Lucy and Charlie Brown are looking out the window, and it is raining so hard you can hardly see them. Lucy, looking worried, says, “Boy, look at it rain....What if it floods the whole world?”

Charlie says, “It will never do that....In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happened again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow.”

Visibly relieved, Lucy says, “You’ve taken a great load off my mind.”

Charlie replies, “Sound theology has a way of doing that!”

Sound theology does indeed take a great load off our minds. Poor theology, however, may give temporary comfort, but if it is wrong, it will never cover sin.

Poor theology does not cover sin. Poor theology says, “God

wants me to have joy in my life, and so it is okay for me to get out of my marriage because I am miserable.” Poor theology says, “The end justifies the means, and so it is okay to do something wrong now because the ultimate goal will be achieved.” That is what the brothers thought when they killed Ish-bosheth. They knew that if Ish-bosheth was dead, David would be king. But, the ends do not justify the means.

Let us never use theology to cover our sin.

IV. God’s Saving Work Leads to Gratitude (4:9)

Fourth, God’s saving work leads to gratitude.

In verse 9 we read that **David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity.”** From a young age, David was very conscious that the Lord had saved his life. The Lord had saved David from a lion and a bear, from enemies in battle, from Goliath the Philistine, and from Saul’s sixteen attempts to kill him. But, in addition to the Lord saving David physically, the Lord had also saved David spiritually. David knew the grace of God in his life personally. And the result of the Lord’s saving work in David’s life led him to give thanks.

In their book titled *Law and Gospel*, William McDavid, Ethan Richardson and Paul Zahl ask you to imagine you fall off the side of an ocean liner and, not knowing how to swim, begin to drown. Someone on the deck spots you, flailing in the water, and throws you a life preserver. It lands directly in front of you and, just before losing consciousness, you grab hold for dear life. They pull you up onto the deck, and you cough the water out of your lungs. People gather around, rejoicing that you are safe and waiting expectantly while you regain your senses. After you finally catch your breath, you open your mouth and say: “Did you see the way I grabbed onto that life preserver? How tightly I held on to it? Did you notice

the definition in my biceps and the dexterity of my wrists? I was all over that thing!”

Needless to say, it would be a bewildering and borderline insane response. To draw attention to the way you cooperated with the rescue effort denigrates the whole point of what happened, which is that you were saved. A much more likely chain of events is that you would immediately seek out the person who threw the life preserver, and you would thank them. Not just superficially, either. You would embrace them, ask them their name, invite them to dinner, maybe give them your cabin!

The authors conclude, “Gratitude is a natural response to salvation. It does not require coercion or encouragement; to the extent that the individual understands what has happened, gratitude will flow organically and abundantly from their heart. The precise form it takes will be different every time, but such is the nature of fruit.”³

David expressed his gratitude for the Lord’s saving work in his life. The Psalms are filled with David’s expressions of gratitude for the Lord’s saving work in his life.

Do you express gratitude for God’s saving work in your life? If not, examine to see whether God has in fact saved you.

V. God’s Judgment Rests on Sinners (4:10-12)

And finally, God’s judgment rests on sinners.

David went on to say that the brothers were mistaken to think that he would be pleased with what they did when they killed Ish-bosheth. Indeed, they had killed **“a righteous man in his own house on his bed”** (4:11). For that **“David commanded his young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But**

³ William McDavid, Ethan Richardson, Paul Zahl, *Law & Gospel* (Mockingbird Ministries, 2015), 73.

they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron.” The most significant feature of their punishment is that they were hanged. David was aware of Deuteronomy 12:23, which says that “a hanged man is cursed by God.”

God’s judgment rests on sinners. The hanging of the brothers was a vivid image of this truth.

Friend, you and I are sinners. God’s judgment will fall on us unless we turn to Jesus and ask him to have God’s judgment fall on him. Have you asked Jesus to have God’s judgment fall on him instead of on you?

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of Ish-bosheth’s assassination in 2 Samuel 4:1-12, let us seek to advance God’s kingdom through faithfulness, not injustice.

In his book titled *Impossible People*, Os Guinness tells about a visit he had with John Stott about three weeks before Stott died. Stott was ninety years old when he died, and he was one of the greatest Christian leaders of the twentieth century. After they had visited for about an hour sharing memories over many decades, Guinness asked Stott how he could pray for him. Lying weakly on his back and barely able to speak, he answered in a hoarse whisper, “Pray that I will be faithful to Jesus until my last breath.”⁴

David waited seven and a half years before the northern territory of Israel submitted to his kingship. He waited patiently, and served God faithfully the entire time.

David’s Greater Son Jesus calls us to follow and serve him faithfully. Let us advance God’s kingdom through faithful service to him. Amen.

⁴ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/october/5100316.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org