

“Counterfeit Justice”  
2 Samuel 14:1-20  
(Preached at Trinity, August 25, 2019)

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. In **Chapter 11** we witnessed the sad downfall of David. Up to this point David's reign had been free from the scandal of personal sin. But no one is ever free from danger. Sin is always just outside the door and we must keep the door tightly barred. It must not be opened, not even a crack, for if we take even a peek sin will quickly enter and we will fall into its grip.
  - A. David's sin began with just a glance of the eye, then the lust of the heart, then the unrestrained act of the flesh. Sin continued to have its way with David until he was consumed.
  - B. In **Chapter 12** David's sin was exposed, David repented, and God forgave him, but the consequence of David's sin left a permanent mark upon David's reign and upon his family. No longer would David have the moral high ground to rule his kingdom or his home with integrity.
2. In **Chapter 13** we find the tragic story of David's children reflecting the moral failure of their father, except with much greater magnitude. His children were spiritually bankrupt and found it easy to disregard the Law of God.
  - A. First, we witnessed the rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon. He considered the satisfaction of his fleshly lusts of much greater importance than obeying God's Law.
  - B. Then we must observe the heart of Tamar. Although she was innocent in the brutal rape by her brother, she considered her own reputation of greater importance than God's Law. She was forbidden to marry her brother, yet she was willing in order to cover her shame.
  - C. Then we have Absalom, who was more concerned about his own vengeance than obeying God. In his anger he fully justified the murder of his brother. David knew of Absalom's evil character and so did not hesitate to believe that Absalom was capable of killing all of his brothers.

**2 Samuel 13:30-31 NAU** - "Now it was while they were on the way that the report came to David, saying, "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons, and not one of them is left." <sup>31</sup> Then the king arose, tore his clothes and lay on the ground"
3. And we can't dismiss the spiritual weakness of David. He lacked the moral fortitude to hold his children accountable. He failed as both father and as the magistrate of Israel. Amnon was not held accountable and Tamar was hidden away in shame. Amnon was then murdered by his brother, Absalom. And, as we shall see, he too was not held accountable for his actions.

Calvin rightly observes – “Since David was king and it was God who had made him sit on the seat of justice, and handed him the sword, he ought to have punished evil-doers justly, and not have spared his son. Yes, he was perplexed over it. But what of that? This was not carrying out the duty to which he was called, no performing his office as he should have done.”<sup>1</sup>

William Blackburn writes: “You expect then that the king will bring from the Jewish law the terrible penalty of death, fixed by Jehovah, that then with Roman courage visit it upon the guilty though he be the eldest son, and heir to the throne. But no! David was very wroth—that was all. He did nothing. He must have wished that he had more carefully disciplined his son; wished that the awful thing had never happened; wished that it could be undone; wished almost everything indeed, but yet he did nothing.”<sup>2</sup>

4. How different it might have been if the Law and Gospel would have been rightly applied to David’s family. Instead of the rejection of the Law’s justice, David would have held his son, Amnon, accountable for his sin, even unto death. He would have applied the Gospel in seeking the repentance of his son and his reconciliation with his sister. Tamar would have been dealt with in the comfort of the grace of forgiveness and restoration. Absalom would have seen justice done and his revenge would have been turned away. Instead of punishing Amnon David basically told Absalom, do it yourself. And then, by not punishing Absalom justice was again denied.
5. David was a good king and a just ruler.
  - A. The Psalms reveal to us a man who delighted in righteousness and justice. It shows us a man who delighted in the worship of God. It shows us a man whose life was governed by the Law of God.
  - B. Sin, however, can have a numbing effect upon our spiritual discernment and holy leanings. These can be temporary consequences but dreadful in the life of the believer.
6. We begin with some verses that are difficult to translate and interpret.  
**2 Samuel 13:38-39 NAU** - "So Absalom had fled and gone to Geshur, and was there three years. <sup>39</sup> *The heart of King David* longed to go out to Absalom; for he was comforted concerning Amnon, since he was dead."
  - A. It would seem that the passing years had softened David’s anger towards Absalom and his mourning for Amnon had become less intense.  
 One expositor translates it:  
*“the king’s anger ceased to be actively directed against Absalom for he had become reconciled to the fact that Amnon was dead.”*<sup>3</sup>
  - B. Although David mourned the death of Amnon, he had fatherly feelings towards his son, Absalom. These feelings are natural and right but become sinful when they usurp our affections for God; when God’s Law is set aside as the result of our love of our child.  
 What we often hear described as “tough love” is simply doing the right thing.

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, John, *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992) pages 641-642.

<sup>2</sup> William M. Blackburn, *The Rebel Prince*, (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, facsimile from the 1864 edition), Page 55.

<sup>3</sup> David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin, *2 Samuel*, 1998, 11, 182.

- C. As we come to **Chapter 14** we read that Joab perceived that David's heart was now "inclined" toward Absalom.  
The word is in italics telling us it is not in the original Hebrew text. Prepositions are often difficult to translate. The word "toward" can mean "the king's heart was toward or upon Absalom."  
The text doesn't actually tell us if his heart was toward Absalom in a positive sense or a negative, but the word "inclined" gives it a positive connotation. Other English translations follow this line of thought.  
The NKJV tells us that "the king's heart was concerned about Absalom."  
The NIV is even stronger: "the king's heart longed for Absalom."
7. The problem was, David's kingdom was already suffering greatly from the spirit of antinomianism—of disregarding the Law of God. How could David bring Absalom back to Jerusalem without the appearance of disregarding justice?  
Absalom was guilty of murder.  
The woman tells David the reason for Joab's actions:  
**2 Samuel 14:20 NAU** - "in order to change the appearance of things your servant Joab has done this thing."  
A. We aren't told Joab's motivation for bringing Absalom out of exile—only that he saw David's heart "inclined" towards Absalom.  
We'll see later that Joab was not loyal to Absalom. He did not have any preconceived idea of serving Absalom as king.  
B. Joab was sometimes unscrupulous, sometimes revengeful, sometimes lawless, but in spite of his self-serving independence that would ultimately cost him his life, he actually did care for King David.  
Joab was concerned about David's distracted heart that made him a distracted king. He could see that David's heart was continually focused upon Absalom.
8. Joab enlists a wise woman from Tekoa. Immediately, we have to ask of what sort was her wisdom—was it carnal, worldly wisdom or was it spiritual wisdom directed by the Word of God?  
The woman comes pretending to be a distressed widow seeking help from the king and spins a tale that was sure to tug upon David's heart as a father. David was the king. He was the magistrate, so she comes to him with a fictitious story seeking his official judgment upon her situation.
9. It was a story about a widow and her only son accused of murder and being pursued by the kinsmen seeking his death. David was quickly drawn in to her story and was stirred in his desire to protect this widow. He responded just as the lady intended.  
**2 Samuel 14:10 NAU** - "Whoever speaks to you, bring him to me, and he will not touch you anymore."  
**2 Samuel 14:11 NAU** - "As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."  
In other words, David ruled that no one would touch her son.
10. The lady quickly compared her situation with David's. Since David showed such mercy upon the widow's remaining son, should this not convict David regarding his own son? After all, the two cases bore striking similarities. Or did they? This testifies to David's problem. He wasn't thinking clearly, not spiritually, not Biblically!
11. The truth is, rather than having similarities, the two accounts bore striking differences. But David could not perceive it. The woman from Tekoa presented a case before David asking him to bring justice.

- A. Then she compared her case to David's banishment of Absalom.  
**2 Samuel 14:13-14 NAU** - "The woman said, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in speaking this word the king is as one who is guilty, *in that* the king does not bring back his banished one. <sup>14</sup> "For we will surely die and are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away life, but plans ways so that the banished one will not be cast out from him."
- B. She implies that David was in the wrong for the exile of Absalom and not restoring him. The story is supposed to bring David to remember Nathan's words, "Thou art the man."  
 She even invokes the name of God, that it was God's will to bring back the banished son.  
 Her conclusion was bringing back Absalom was the right thing to do. The king would be rendering justice.
- C. And then she sealed the deal with a little flattery  
**2 Samuel 14:20 NAU** - "But my lord is wise, like the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all that is in the earth."
12. This was not God's justice. It was counterfeit justice. This is an ongoing problem. People demand justice, but the justice they are demanding is not true justice. This is often seen today in the frequent demands for social justice. Often it is based more upon the ideas of human reason than upon rightly applying the Word of God.
- I. First, we need to see how the case of the woman differs significantly from the case of Absalom. Where she was asking for justice, everything about the case of Absalom was a case of injustice.
- A. The crimes of the two sons were not the same
1. The act of the widow's son was not premeditated, and not intentional. The brother was killed in the heat of a struggle that could have ended in the death of either son.  
 The cities of refuge were established to provide protection until the case could be resolved.
  2. Absalom had committed a well-planned, premeditated murder. There was no refuge provided for the cold-blooded murder by Absalom.  
**Numbers 35:20-21 NAU** - "If he pushed him of hatred, or threw something at him lying in wait and *as a result* he died, <sup>21</sup> or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and *as a result* he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death"
- B. Justice demands just judgment.
1. The Law's protection against false accusations was the demand of witnesses.  
**Deuteronomy 17:6 NAU** - "On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness."

2. The same principle is applied in the New Covenant  
**Matthew 18:15-16 NAS** - "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. <sup>16</sup>  
 "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed."  
**1 Timothy 5:19 NAU** - "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses."
  3. The woman's son had killed his brother without witness (**V.5** - "there was no one to separate them")
  4. Absalom killed in the presence of many witnesses—all of David's sons were present.
- C. The woman's remaining son was the sole remaining heir who could continue his father's name. David had many remaining sons, each being potential heirs to the throne.
- D. The woman's son was in imminent danger
1. The whole family had risen as the avenger of blood. Immediate intervention was demanded to allow time for just judgment.
  2. Absalom was in no immediate danger. It had been over three years since the murder took place. The text tells us that David's had been consoled regarding the death of Amnon and Absalom was safely dwelling in the home of his maternal grandfather.
- II. David fell for the deception because he was more inclined to apply the reason of human sentimentality than the principles of the Word of God.
- A. David rightly understood the failure of his justice
1. It was a compromised justice which was no justice at all
  2. He allowed Absalom to return, but did not seek reconciliation and restoration  
**2 Samuel 14:24 NAU** - "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face." So Absalom turned to his own house and did not see the king's face."
- B. David's justice was ruled by his feelings
1. Human feelings are fickle and always changing
  2. At first David was outraged the rape by Amnon, but his outrage soon cooled and David was content to put aside justice
  3. Then he was outraged at the crime of Absalom in the murder of Amnon But now his outrage has cooled and his heart is longing after Absalom
  4. Justice cannot be governed by our feelings
- C. Too many condemn God's justice because they "feel" it is too harsh
1. Some deny that God could ever cast a person into hell Surely, a loving God would be able to forgive and forget
  2. Like Absalom, fallen man is in exile from God. But they believe God should take pity and return us all from our exile. They feel this would be just and compassionate.
    - a. This is because for most justice is governed by their sentimentality.
    - b. This is why the death penalty is abolished in most states. It is because people feel it is too harsh.

**Conclusion:**

1. God has provided a way for the sinner to return from exile It can only happen as justice is accomplished. Justice was not accomplished with Absalom and reconciliation had not taken place.
2. God has provided a way for his just anger to be satisfied.  
It won't be satisfied by the mere passing of time.  
It won't be satisfied by His love towards the creature.  
It can only be satisfied in a manner that will allow His justice to be satisfied.  
That will happen as the sinner bears his just condemnation.  
God has provided another way for His justice to be satisfied.  
Jesus Christ suffered God's divine justice in our place.
3. Any other justice is a counterfeit justice, which is no justice at all and will not stand.