

2nd Samuel 19:41-20:2

Never-ending Strife

And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel – v. 43

Just when you thought there might be a happy ending (at least to the end of the chapter) you have to face the last 3 verses of chp. 19 which provide the transition into chp. 20. Everything looked so good. The rebellion of Absalom was put down. David was restored as king. And even though it took the tribe of Judah a little longer to respond to the idea they eventually came around and the kingdom was united in bringing back David to be king. The reasoning for doing so was sound – 19:9,10: *And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. 10 And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?*

And so the king did come back. And you could say that upon his return he was demonstrating grace and mercy. Shimei, the one who had cursed him was granted forgiveness instead of being executed; Mephibosheth was able to convince the king that he had not been disloyal to him; Barzillai was rewarded for his steadfast loyalty and everything looked good. But then we have the account of strife and contention arising out of something pretty insignificant don't we? The Israelites wanted to know why they weren't consulted and why their advice wasn't taken with regard to the manner in which David was brought back to Jerusalem.

You know what that reminds me of? It reminds me of the strife and contention that can arise between family members over the way a wedding is planned. How many guests should be invited? Who should be in the bride's wedding party? Do we really have to invite 500 people for fear that leaving someone out might hurt someone's feelings? What kind of reception should we have? What colors should the bridesmaid's dresses be? If the groom has a lick of sense about him he learns early on not to even enter into such a fray.

Isn't that what we have at the end of this chapter in 2nd Samuel? *Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan? (v. 41); The king is near of kin to us (v. 42) Why should you be angry about that? We have 10 parts in the king and we have more right to him than you do (v. 43).* Fortunately in this strife we're not left in suspense as to who prevailed. It was Judah - *And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.*

The whole account makes you want to shout at them all – Now children, stop arguing and behave yourselves! But when you follow the narrative into chp. 20 you see that fierce words lead to fierce actions. *And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O*

Israel. 2 So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem.

Strife and contention – here it is again. Are you noticing a repetitious theme throughout 2nd Samuel? There's strife between the house of David and the house of Saul; There's strife between David and his first wife Michal; There's strife between the sons of David which leads to Absalom slaying his half brother, Amnon; then there's strife between Absalom and David as Absalom steals the hearts of the men of Israel and leads an uprising against his father, David. Now there's strife between Judah and the rest of the tribes of Israel and if you care to follow the narrative into 1st Kings you'll discover that following Solomon's reign there's strife between the Northern and Southern tribe of Israel that leads to an irreparable breach that stays with them throughout their history.

Sadly, it doesn't get much better in the New Testament. There's strife between the disciples of Christ. Lu 22:24 *And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.* Paul would write to the Philippians from prison and say *Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: 16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: 17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel* (Phil. 1:15-17).

And of course there's the most prominent example of the church at Corinth who divided themselves over their favorite preacher – I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, I'm of Christ – which prompted Paul to write in 1Cor. 3:3 *For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

Paul's word to the Galatians is perhaps the most graphic when he says to them in Ga 5:15 *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.* Doesn't such a word present a vivid and awful picture? Can you imagine such a thing? Christians behaving like a pack of stray dogs that bite and devour each other! We read Isaiah 11 earlier in the service and one of the things that struck me about that chapter that increases my groaning for the Lord's return are the words of v. 13 in their broader application to all the people of God: *The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.* There's coming a day in which the kind of thing we have in these closing verses of 2nd Samuel 19 will be no more.

Even the cruelties of nature will be transformed so that *The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them* (v.6). Doesn't such a serenely beautiful, untroubled, and happy picture lead you heave a sigh that says *even so come Lord Jesus?* But in the mean time we still have to live in this present world. You have to get out of bed in the morning and go about your work and try even as a Christian to stand out in a world that has been and will be characterized by strife. How can you do it?

That's the question I want to raise and answer this morning.

How Does the Christian Deal with Never-ending Strife?

Let's begin by dealing with the obvious. The first thing a Christian must do in dealing with never-ending strife is that:

I. He Must Face the Reality of It

This was certainly a reality that David couldn't escape. It's not hard to picture him heaving a sigh toward heaven as he beholds the strife between Judah and the rest of Israel. It was true that the other tribes spoke first about bringing David back. You may recall that David had to send a delegation consisting of Zadok and Abiathar to say to the elders of Judah *Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house* (v. 11). And now with his own tribe, the tribe that may have trembled in their boots, so to speak, for fear of retribution – now with them on board you can imagine that David's hopes were high that his re-election (if you will) would go off without a hitch.

But it was not to be. No sooner was one uprising put down but another one arises. And before David's days on earth are done there would be another attempt by another of his sons to set himself on the throne instead of Solomon. It's a phenomenon, I'm afraid, that has always characterized man since his fall into sin. And the thing we have to face is that strife can be found on every level.

On a national level nations have been at strife with each other for as long as nations have been in existence. It seems doesn't it, that we study the history of the world in terms of wars between nations. Christ could have been speaking historically as well as prophetically when he said *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom* (Mt. 24:7).

But in David's case the strife wasn't coming from outside sources. It was not the Philistines that were arguing with the tribe of Judah, it was those within the Kingdom of David. And so we can narrow the focus and say that strife is not only found between nations but strife is found within nations. We certainly know that in our country don't we? The kind of polarization that is found in our nation must be very close to matching the strife that brought our nation to war within itself some 150 years ago.

But not only is such strife found within a nation, but it's also found within the church of Jesus Christ. One of the things that is often thrown at the church by skeptics is all the divisions between the churches. Have you ever wondered how many denominations there are in the world today? According to an article from *The World Christian Encyclopedia* there are some 33,000 denominations in the world at this present day. How many of them come into existence because of strife within a denomination?

I can't keep up even with Presbyterian history. I've heard Presbyterian history described as alphabet soup with all of the 3 or 4 letter designations that describe the various Presbyterian denominations – You have PCA; PCUSA; OPC; RPC; FPC; ARP etc. etc.

You can do the same thing with Baptists – Southern Baptists; Northern Baptists; Reformed Baptists; Independent Baptists; General Association of Regular Baptists; Primitive Baptists etc. etc. Now I'm not about to say that split offs from other denominations and other churches are never necessary. In fact they are especially in times when those denominations become infected with modernistic notions that deny the fundamentals of the faith. But by the same token – many split offs (maybe even most split offs) have no more substance to them than the Israelites in our text being put out because they weren't sought out and their advice wasn't taken in the manner in which David was brought back to Jerusalem.

But we can narrow the scope of our analysis further still. Not only do we find strife at a national level or among denominations and churches but what about families? How often are families upset with other families these days? The quickest way I know to get other families mad at you (especially if they're homeschool families) is to let them know ways in which you think they can do their homeschooling better. You have a better curriculum or you have a better program, or you utilize better techniques. I think a very clear mark of our homeschool culture is hypersensitivity to what often times is misperception about the way other families view you.

So there's strife between families and there's strife within families. Parents with children; children with parents; husbands with wives; wives with husbands. I guess when you think about it and consider how strife is found on every level it's a wonder we manage to get along as well as we do. And yet we're not done yet. We can narrow the focus of our analysis yet one more step and perhaps this last step gets to the heart of why strife and contention is found on every level.

James asks the very question that I suppose we're pondering just now in his epistle 4:1 *From whence [come] wars and fightings among you? [come they] not hence, [even] of your lusts that war in your members?* Here is what it all really boils down to – this explains wars between nations, and strife between denominations and churches and families with other families and strife within families. It comes down to the strife within an individual's own members.

I don't know that it was this particular verse in James so much as it was the truth that this verse conveys that convinced me that Bible is God's Word. Here is the right diagnosis for all that's wrong in the world today – the Bible diagnoses it simply and comprehensively. It's sin. And not "out there" sin but "in here" sin. Doesn't that account for the strife between the men of Judah and the men of Israel? Doesn't that account for the wars between nations or the wars between and within families? It's the war that takes place in every man's soul. And the first thing that must be done to deal with strife is to recognize its ultimate source.

Some time ago I watched a DVD series on marriage conducted by Paul Tripp entitled: *What did you Expect?* And the subtitle is: *Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*. The thing that most impressed me in that series was the way Dr. Tripp endeavored to compel each

spouse to look at his own life instead of the other's life. It's so typical today that when such strife occurs each one sees so clearly and so fully the sin in the other and when it comes to their own sin, there's an acknowledgement that sin is there too – but the other person – his (or her) sins are way more and way bigger than my little insignificant blemishes. I can still see the scene in one of his lectures when Dr. Tripp calls on his audience to raise their right hands and repeat after him: *I am my marriage problem.*

And this must be our approach to never-ending strife. I'm not an exception to it – you're not an exception to it. It's a mark of a fallen world and it's part of our depraved natures. I know that the Puritans are sometimes criticized for being so intensely introspective. But in our day I'm not so sure that such a thing is a problem. I have to be careful. For some people it is a serious problem. Be that as it may – the first way to deal with never-ending strife is to face the reality of it, not just in our world but in our own hearts. So that's the first thing – facing the reality. Consider with me next that when it comes to dealing with never-ending strife:

II. The Christian Must Identify the Causes

Why was it such a big deal to the Israelites that the tribe of Judah had a prominent part in bringing David back to Jerusalem? They asked that very question in v. 42 ... *wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift?*

It's not hard to imagine the scenario playing out the opposite way is it? What if the Israelites had played the prominent role? It would have been the tribe of Judah that asked *Why have you stolen the king away from us?* – to which they would have answered *because we have ten parts in the king and because we were the first to initiate his return. Why are you angry about the matter? Have we eaten at all of the king's cost? Or hath he given us any gift?* – to which the men of Judah would have answered *The king is near of kin to us, therefore our advice should have been sought and followed.*

The whole thing seems kind of silly, doesn't it? It becomes very serious, however, when the tensions between Judah and the other tribes would become so great that we find in chp. 20 the Israelites going from 10 parts in David to no part in David. All it took was a trumpet blast from a man who's labeled *a son of Belial* which means literally "someone who is worthless." Look at what it says in 20:1 *And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name [was] Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel.*

I heard one preacher make an insightful remark on this verse when he noted how loud professions are not always substantive professions. See how quickly the Israelites go from ten parts to no part. He also noted how the crowd that shouted hosannas for Christ soon after called for Him to be crucified. It was certainly an all or nothing kind of mentality that was manifested by the Israelites wasn't it? I either get my way or I have nothing to do with David. That's the attitude and mindset of the tribes of Israel.

We do well to ask how does this happen? And how does it happen among God's people? We may well understand it happening in the world but as Christians we're suppose to be above the world.

We can trace one cause from a verse I cited a moment ago – James 4:1 *From whence [come] wars and fightings among you?* James goes on to answer the question he raises with a rhetorical question: *come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* Here's where strife originates. It's traceable to lusts that war in our own members. Lust can be a perfectly legitimate desire that becomes so out of balance that it dominates a man or a woman. One of the greatest challenges that young people face today is the ability to distinguish between lust and love. Attraction to a person can spring from or lead to love, but obsession with a person becomes a legitimate desire being corrupted. The same can be said for money – the desire for it isn't a bad thing, but obsession with it is a legitimate desire becoming corrupted.

Even greatness can be a legitimate desire. When Christ's disciples argued between themselves over who was the greatest, Christ did not rebuke them for wanting to be great in the kingdom. He did make it clear, however, that greatness in the kingdom of Christ was not obtained the way greatness was gained in the world. Greatness in the world comes through assertiveness; greatness in the kingdom of Christ comes through service of others after the example of Christ.

In close connection with lust another cause of never-ending strife can be found in pride. That's really what comes out in our text in 2Sam. 19 isn't it? There was a pride issue at stake here – a desire for prominence when it came to the matter of bringing David back to Jerusalem. That word *prominence* is defined as *conspicuous importance*. Isn't that what was at stake in the narrative? Both parties were interested in conspicuous importance. And it was from wounded pride that the Israelites went from ten parts in David to no part in David – the all or nothing mentality or to use the more current vernacular: *It's my way or the highway*.

Pr 28:25 *He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife*

Pr 13:10 *Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised [is] wisdom.*

Pr 17:19 *He loveth transgression that loveth strife: [and] he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.*

Lust and pride and being governed by the flesh – that's another cause to never-ending strife. 1Co 3:3 *For ye are yet carnal: for whereas [there is] among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* That's pretty easy to detect in our narrative isn't it? – not a lot of humility or spirituality or faith here but a whole lot of carnal pride driven by an inordinate desire for prominence.

And these are challenges that we all face. You can find Paul having to deal with such matters in just about every one of his epistles if not all of them. It was a problem at Corinth; it was a problem in Galatia; it was a problem even among the Philippians; he

deals with it in Colossians. It's a problem that goes all the way back to Genesis 3 and manifests itself throughout the entire history of redemption. We might as well face the reality of it and recognize the causes for it but unless you make the application very personal to your own heart and life rather than seeing and hoping that others around you see and make the applications to their lives, then you'll never really be in a position to utilize the solution.

To those that find themselves, by the grace of God willing the face the reality and identify the causes in their own lives – this last point, then is for you. How do we deal with never-ending strife? We must recognize the reality, identify the causes, and finally:

III. We Must Apply the Solution

I'll have to look beyond the narrative of 2Samuel 19 for that solution because, unfortunately, we don't have a narrative account of the tribe of Judah or the ten tribes of Israel applying it. And in a sense that's a shame – because the solution to their strife was in a sense right in front of them.

What should have been their focus? Shouldn't it have been the fact that their king had returned? Wasn't that the important thing? Wasn't that the big thing? Their champion was with them. The one who had defeated their enemies and protected them and watched for them the same way he had earlier in his life watched over his father's sheep as a shepherd – the fact that he was restored to them should have been the thing that governed their thoughts and actions.

I'm afraid that the narrative reveals to us what is far too often the common phenomenon in the lives of many Christians which is that their misgivings rule their hearts rather than their blessings. It should have been a time of great joy and rejoicing – David was back. David was on the throne again. Everything else should have been subordinate to that truth. You might say that Mephibosheth got it right in v. 30 when he said with regard to Ziba getting half the land: *Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.*

Shouldn't the thing that rules our hearts be that our King is on His throne and that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ? To have any part of salvation at all is to be blessed with so much more than we deserve that our testimonies should be that of the Psalmist when he said: *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.* (Psalm 84:10).

Your King has come and He's accomplished your redemption by giving His life for His sheep. And He's risen and ascended into heaven where He's seated at God's right hand; and He's building His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against Him; and He's coming again and upon His return He's going to openly acknowledge and acquit you in the day of judgment and make you perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of Him throughout eternity.

Such blessings as the blessings of salvation should make every form of strife and contention so petty to you that you become practically immune to quarrels and strife altogether. Not all that long ago we went through Paul's epistle to the Philippians. In that epistle I focused on a verse that I said goes so strongly against the natural man's attitude and actions that it can't possibly be lived out apart from the Holy Spirit.

Here's that verse: Php 2:3 *[Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* This is the verse that leads to that well known portion that sets before you the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. That section of Philippians that is so deep and rich in its theological formulations serves a very practical purpose in the believer's life.

So long as I have the mind of Christ in me then I will not allow anything to be done through strife or vainglory and in lowliness of mind I will esteem others better than myself and I will look not to my own things but to the things of others. In Paul's epistle to the Colossians, written at the same time and from the same prison as his epistle to the Philippians Paul speaks in chp. 3 of things that are to be put off and things that are to be put on.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

A few verses later some other things that you're to put on: Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

Now the only way you'll find the strength or power and desire to put off certain things and put on the right things is that you'll have to know how bountiful blessed you are. You'll have to be so impressed with what your King has done and is doing and will do that His blessings rule your heart. If His blessings don't rule your heart then don't be surprised when you find yourself engulfed in strife and quarrels and misgivings that come at you from every source whether it be your job, your home, your church, your family or whatever.

You must know your blessings – that's it in a nutshell. If you would deal rightly with never-ending strife then you must know your blessings. Your heart must be illuminated to the glorious truth that you were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world that you should be holy and without blame before Him in love. And that you've been accepted and adopted and will be acquitted and have already been declared righteous – these things must and should rule your hearts and govern all that you do and all that you abstain from doing.

May the Lord Himself, then, give you grace and give you victory.