

Sermon 53: 2 Samuel 20: Worldliness in the kingdom

OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter has no mention of God but only one incidental reference to Abel being the heritage of the Lord in v19. That captures well the tone of our chapter today. It is a parade of sins. This of course does not mean that God is not causing His will to come to pass but we are struck with the realities of worldliness in all its forms in the kingdom. So as we go through this chapter we want to note the various ways in which sin raises its head in our midst. It is the same sins that wounded the people of God in David's day that wounds it today.

Worldly conflicts

If I had to ask you who the greater enemy is to the people of God, human beings or the devil which would you answer? Although the devil is by far the greater enemy with the greater power, his greatest tool is other people. Eph. 4:26-27, 'Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.' Here we are in a moment of triumph when David is being brought back to the throne but someone rises up to cause divisions.

Now you will well know that sinful hearts are tinder that only need a little spark as an excuse to erupt in volcanic ways. Let's look at the piddly thing that sets off another civil war. 2 Samuel 19:40, 'The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. All the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel, brought the king on his way.' There it is. All of Judah is present, but only half of the other tribes. But since Judah is apparently given preferential treatment as if the rest do not matter, it sets off a war. We see Judah is insensitive, not thinking of the other tribes. But Israel is not blameless look how easily they take offence and how they put the worst possible spin on Judah's actions. Israel accuses Judah of 'stealing' the king, and of Judah 'despising' the rest of Israel. Judah does not take well to the accusations and answers with harshness and possibly threatens violence, 19:43. This sets Sheba up to walk in and recreate another civil war. He calls Israel to divide from David and leave them to Judah 20:1-2. Sheba is a Benjaminite and may even be a relation to Saul.

This is familiar territory, and it feels like a spat between siblings. However, it is most important for us to study such pettiness because this is exactly what we are like. Due to our insensitivity, oversensitivity and general selfishness we too are prone to dividing over the most insignificant things. It all begins with some thoughtless people who were thinking only of themselves. We see a similar problem of thoughtlessness in the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 11. There we see them celebrating the Lord's Supper, but the rich go ahead and eat before the slaves have knocked off work, and go ahead and make gluttons of themselves and get drunk while the poor have nothing. Thoughtlessness is a passive form of selfishness, at rest and acting naturally you just don't think of others but only see things from your own perspective.

The Israelites though are oversensitive and accuse Judah of the worst possible things. Think of our loveless this sort of way of thinking is. You will only gladly believe the worst about someone if you are not seeking their highest good. It is a form of lying and self-deception where we continue to fuel our sinful anger with lies in order to sustain it. We want justice for some slight and now we create a narrative after the fact to legitimise our anger. It is birthed from pride, for how dare they do what they did to you. Think of how selfish we are this way. When anything hurts us or crosses us we attack it. The best example of this that I can think of is the fact that we attack God when we get hurt. Think on the logic of that. God who is perfect, who can do no wrong, who loves us and is working all things out for the good of His church. When things go wrong we instantly fly into a rage and look for a punching bag, and how many people attack God when they get hurt. There is something deeply wrong in our hearts and it shows itself in the inordinate amount of anger we take revenge with.

Judah of course will have none of it, and answer still more fiercely. The imposing of our will through our anger. James 1:19-20, 'Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.' Look at what anger produces, it got the whole nations back up and Sheba could divide them. It is no wonder that Paul talks about giving the devil no opportunity. Insensitivity, oversensitivity and anger are enemies to our unity, whether it be in the family, the church or as in Israel the nation.

'The know of Vipers by Francois Mauriac tells a similar story of an old man who spends the last decades—decades—of his marriage down the hall from his wife. A rift had opened thirty years before over whether the husband showed enough concern when their five-year-old daughter fell ill. Now, neither husband nor wife is willing to take the first step. Every night he waits for her to approach him, but she never appears. Every night she lies awake waiting for him to approach her, and he never appears. Neither will break the cycle that began years earlier. Neither will forgive.

In her memoir of a truly dysfunctional family, *The Liar's Club*, Mary Karr tells of a Texas uncle who remained married to his wife but did not speak to her for forty years after a fight about how much money she spent on sugar. One day he took out a lumber saw and sawed their house exactly in half. He nailed up planks to cover the raw sides and moved one of the halves behind a copse of scruffy pine trees on the same acre of ground. There the two, husband and wife, lived out the rest of their days in separate half-houses.

Our capacity for petty division is infinite. God as a slighted husband takes us back even though we have been adulterous wives. Our sins against God are not minor nor merely perceived but He has pursued reconciliation with us. Here we see men being men, and this is what we build when left to ourselves. God has come to make us one again, to teach us to forgive each other, He has shown us that the way to reconciliation is through one of the parties being willing to bear the expense and humble themselves to seek reconciliation. This deadlock of war is the result of living without the grace of God.

Worldly solutions

David returns to the throne, he comes back to Jerusalem and seeks to put his house in order and we see what he does in verse 3, 'And David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up

until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.' These ten concubines were the ten that David left in Jerusalem and who Absalom raped. For their troubles David rewards them with an isolated widowhood. David is wrong for having these wives in the first place, but this is what they are. Here instead of making the best of a bad situation and being a good husband to these women, instead he goes from bad to worse. These young women who would have been chosen for their youth and beauty are now relocated into a nunnery. David denies them their basic rights as wives.

Marriage comes with obligations, and David is forsaking his. As married men and women we are obligated to share our bodies, our time, our money and all that we are with our spouses. Marriages are not relationships of convenience, we do not simply shirk them off when they become tiresome or inconvenient. We are to invest in them ensuring that we are spending quality time with our spouses, having conversations both light and meaningful.

Worldly ambitions

The central focus of our chapter though is putting the revolt of Sheba down. But part of this story is the power struggle between Joab and Amasa. Joab has been removed from his position for his murder of Absalom. So when David needs someone to gather the people together we see in verse 4 that David uses Amasa as general as he promised in the last chapter. But we see a problem, the tribe of Judah who had used David as a way of feeling superior to their fellow Israelites, are now unwilling to gather in support of the king. And so now Amasa who is to urgently respond to this situation is delayed. Please notice how Judah is like the crowd who crucified. They cry Hosanna, and then they turn their backs on him. The tribe of Judah were willing to associate with the king when the spotlight was on them and it was a time of feasting and triumph, but come the time for fighting and they cannot be roused. Our own service to the king often goes like this. We do the parts we like but are not willing to do the hard things.

David needs action so he then turns to Abishai to instead of Joab to rouse some men to react quickly, v6. But verse 7 signals something for us. Here is Amasa's army, and Abishai is leading but verse 7 calls them Joab's men. Verses 7-10 document in detail how Joab the man with worldly ambition kills his own cousin. The most important part of the detail is the mention of the right hand. Joab takes Amasa's beard with his right hand. The right hand was the hand you hold your sword in and show intent of fighting with. Here Joab is lying and pretending peace and murders Amasa to keep his position in the army.

Joab is an important person for us to note because he is extremely loyal to David and yet is very wilful and ambitious. Here he is killing to get David his kingdom, but he is also willing to murder Abner, Absalom and Amasa, perhaps he doesn't like people whose names start with the letter A. he will serve David, until his own purposes and position are compromised then he will do his own thing. I agree with one commentator who sees Joab as one of those who Christ is addressing in Matt. 7:23, 'And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Here is a man who would have been in the church, and for all appearances look like he is loyal to the king, but his self-enthronement and service of King Joab is revealed whenever the will of Joab and the will of the king disagree. There are those who worship and serve God because it is convenient to do so, because it pays to do so, but when serving God is not what we want we then do our own thing. This is someone who is serving self and not God.

One wonders why Joab was not punished by David, why did David allow Joab to continue to lead his armies after this? Some have surmised that Joab already had too much influence in

the army and could create more problems than anyone else. Joab probably gambled and thought to himself that if he put this revolt down quickly and cleanly that he might be restored to duties, removing Amasa was part of that gamble.

Worldly wisdom

Sheba it appears was unable to garner much support. When Israel was talking against David it appeared that Sheba had them on his side, but as soon as it came time to act, Sheba felt their devotion to his cause fade away. We see in verse 14 that only the Bichrites followed him. They took refuge in Abel. Joab comes to lay siege against the city and a wise woman convinces her town to throw Sheba's head over the wall to save the city. We are told that she was wise but the wisdom feels more like shrewdness than the godly wisdom of Solomon or the book of Proverbs.

One commentator takes the opportunity to list all the times wisdom, good or bad is used in Samuel. David schemes to cover up the Bathsheba affair; Nathan wisely exposes David; Jonadab's shrewd counsel to help Amnon rape his sister; Absalom's patient scheming to kill Amnon; Absalom's manipulation of Joab and David to be restored; Joab use of a wise woman to try and trick David; David's recruitment of Hushai and others to undermine Absalom's new government; Ziba's deception about Mephibosheth to secure his estate; Hushai's sabotaging of Ahithophel's counsel. Wisdom can simply be seen as the skill of being successful, and we must note that wisdom without sanctification is a lethal thing.

Sin is rife in the kingdom but the chapter ends with a record of David's administration. He is still king, God's promises to him despite his sin and the sin of others is still coming to pass.