

“Applying the Sixth Commandment”
2 Samuel 20:4-23
(Preached at Trinity, February 9, 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. David crossed over the Jordan and was escorted to Gilgal and 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."
2. Peace had returned to the kingdom of David. Peace and unity, however, are elusive. About the time we feel we can relax a new dispute arises. Unity has to be protected. Churches know this well.
3. David soon discovered his own peace would be short-lived. Before he even arrived back at Jerusalem a new division was brewing that was even more dangerous than the revolt of Absalom. It began 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?"
5. David knew Sheba and his revolt had to be crushed quickly. The kingdom had just concluded a civil war and he could not afford another insurrection. When David returned from exile he made some major changes in his leadership. The most significant was replacing Joab as general with Amasa.
 - A. Amasa had served as Absalom's general. Both Joab and Amasa were David's nephews.
2 Samuel 17:25 NAU - "Absalom set Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Now Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Ithra the Israelite, who went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother."
 - B. This was a strategic decision for David in regaining the hearts of the people and demonstrating that he would not inflict revenge upon those who served under Absalom.
 - C. It was also retribution against Joab who had killed Absalom against David's orders.
6. But Joab was not a man to cross. David often tread lightly with regard to Joab. After Joab murdered Abner David knew he could not withstand Joab.
2 Samuel 3:39 NAU - "I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too difficult for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil."

7. With the revolt of Sheba David acted quickly and enlisted his new general with his first major assignment. Time was of the essence to stop Sheba before he caused major division in the kingdom.
2 Samuel 20:4 NAU - "Then the king said to Amasa, "Call out the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself."
- A. For some reason, Amasa was unable to return within the allotted time. Perhaps he found the men of Judah less than motivated to return to war so soon after the war with Absalom.
- B. It may have also been an unwillingness to follow Amasa over Joab.
8. Whatever the reason, David quickly turned to Abishai, Joab's brother.
2 Samuel 20:6 NAU - "And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, so that he does not find for himself fortified cities and escape from our sight."
9. Joab also went out, leading the Cherethites, David's mighty men. Joab was committed to David and the nation, but he was also an opportunist. He wanted what was good for David, but he also wanted what was good for himself.
10. In our text this evening we find before us in this narrative the account of two men losing their lives. One was Amasa. The other Sheba. Joab was involved in both. The Sixth Commandment forbids murder – "Thou shalt not kill." But the Sixth Commandment does not condemn the taking of a human life in every case. What it condemns is murder, the act of one man taking the life of another unjustifiably.
11. Were the deaths of these two men acts of murder?
- I. The death of Amasa
- A. Joab killed Amasa
1. It was an intentional.
 The text is a bit unclear, but it seems that Joab had a short sword attached to his belt and he allowed it to come free and fall to the ground. He then picked it up with his left hand and then took the beard of Amasa in his right hand. It was customary for a man to greet another by holding his beard and kissing him on the cheek. When Joab leaned in to kiss him Amnon did not see the sword in his left hand. Joab then thrust the sword into his belly.
 2. It was cruel. Joab inflicted a mortal wound, but instead of finishing him off with a second thrust of the sword, he allowed him to lie on the ground in agony.
 3. It was treacherous. Amasa was Joab's cousin which made the act particularly villainous. He approached him to give a kiss of brotherhood. The literal word used for "Is it well with you" is **שָׁלוֹם** – "Peace"
 It reminds us of the treachery of Judas who betrayed Jesus with a kiss.
- B. Would this fall into the category of a justifiable taking of a life
1. Joab would have felt justified in the act. Amasa was chosen by David as Joab's replacement. Joab questioned the wisdom of this, not to mention his own personal ambition. He may have pretended to have David's interests at heart. But was it justifiable?
 2. It was not self-defense
 3. It was not an act of war. Amnon was not an enemy at war with Israel.
 4. Amnon had not committed a crime worthy of a civil execution.

5. Nor was Amnon an enemy of the state, one who had committed treason or an act of insurrection. His only error was failure to arrive on time.
 6. Joab had one ultimate motive. David had demoted Joab and advanced Amnon to the rank of general. Joab was removing a rival. It was an unjustifiable act of murder.
Joab was so hardened he left his cousin to his misery and departed. Matthew Henry described his villainy: "He did it impudently, not in a corner, but at the head of his troops, and in their sight, as one that was neither ashamed nor afraid to do it, that was so hardened in blood and murders that he could neither blush nor tremble."¹
 7. Once again, the narrator does not give us any moralistic commentary. He only describes the cruelty, but Joab seems to go unpunished.
- C. There are many times that violations of Gods' Law seem to go unpunished
1. This is only from our human perspective. God's justice will be carried out perfectly. Moses' word to the Reubenites and Gadites are universal.
Numbers 32:23 NAU - "But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out."
 2. Joab's plan was successful. He returned to his place as David's general.
2 Samuel 20:23 NAU - "Now Joab was over the whole army of Israel"
 3. Although the narrator does not condemn the action of Joab, David was not ignorant of the deed. David was patient and carried out justice in his time. Before his death he instructed Solomon regarding Joab.
1 Kings 2:5-6 NAU - "Now you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner, and to Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed; he also shed the blood of war in peace. And he put the blood of war on his belt about his waist, and on his sandals on his feet. ⁶ "So act according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to Sheol in peace."

II. The death of Sheba

- A. Sheba's initial success quickly declined and he desperately went from city to city until finally settled in a walled city by the name of Abel Beth-maacah
1. Joab and his army besieged the city. The built a rampart to go over the wall and also began digging at the foundation of the wall to topple it.
The city was doomed to fall to the army of Joab.
 2. There was a wise woman within the city. Perhaps she was the chief leader in the city, unusual for the day. She may also have simply been among the many woman of valor remembered in history who stood courageously in defense of her home and family.
 - a. Wise as the narrator has used it does not necessarily have any moral implications. But she was skilled in evaluating a situation and coming to a sensible decision.

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 472.

- b. She called upon Joab to enter into negotiation. She understood the Hebrew law. She was prepared to offer terms of peace.
Deuteronomy 20:10-12 NAU - "When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. ¹¹ "If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. ¹² "However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it."
3. Like Abigail, she knew how to speak words of peace
2 Samuel 20:19 NAU - "I am of those who are peaceable *and* faithful in Israel. You are seeking to destroy a city, even a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"
4. Joab explained the situation to her – “Hand over Sheba and we’ll depart. The woman immediately replies:
Verse 21 - "Behold, his head will be thrown to you over the wall."
5. She went to speak with the people of the city and they immediately complied:
2 Samuel 20:22 NAU - "And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it to Joab."
6. And thus, the insurrection of Sheba came to a screeching halt.
- B. Was the removal of Sheba’s head in violation of the Sixth Commandment?
1. Several aspects justify the death of Sheba and clearing the wise woman from the charge of murder
- This was a time of war and she was defending her city.
 - Sheba was guilty of treason and insurrection and Joab had come in the name of the king. This wise woman was acting on the authority of the king.
 - This was not the action of an individual but the decision of the city.
2. This wise woman was also acting in self-defense.
 David’s kingdom had fallen into disorder. David had failed on many points to secure justice and peace for his people. David had failed in dealing with his son and also with his general.
 Richard Phillips makes an important point: “The primary point of this episode, however, was to assess not the woman of Abel, but the king whose realm had failed to secure peace. The reason that private citizens had to take up the sword in self-defense was that the civil authority instituted by God had failed to wield the sword for the public good.”²

² Richard Phillips, *2 Samuel, Reformed Expository Commentary*. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2018), Page 357.

Conclusion:

1. Truly, the matter before us should not be whether or not the taking of human life was in violation of God's Law. The issue is that death was very much a part of David's reign. Sin was very much a part of David's reign.
Joab blew the trumpet and returned to Jerusalem, but all was not well. He was faithful to David, but not submissive. In this sense, rebellion was still a part of David's kingdom. With Joab leading the army, was the Davidic kingdom truly secure?
2. David was a man after God's own heart. He was God's anointed king. He was Israel's Psalmist, the composer of Israel's songs of praise.
And yet, his kingdom was wrought with failure because it was plagued by sin.
3. **Verses 23-26** describes the leadership of Israel. It is almost identical to the list in **Chapter 8** but with a couple obvious differences.
 - A. One is the intro to the list in **Chapter 8**
2 Samuel 8:15 NAU - "So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people."
In this updated list there is nothing mentioned of David's successful reign as king. His kingdom can no longer be called a kingdom of justice and righteousness.
 - B. There is now a new office in Israel
2 Samuel 20:24 NAU - "Adoram was over the forced labor"
 1. The forced labor was some sort of slave class that included Israelites.
 2. It was this forced slavery that would divide the kingdom after the death of Solomon. All was not well.
4. No earthly kingdom and no earthly king can solve the issue of human sin and corruption. The only solution comes from the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom, Jesus Christ, the King of kings.
5. Only through Jesus Christ do we find the solution for human corruption. Only through Jesus Christ do we find the solution for our sin. He has delivered us from sin and we are awaiting the arrival of the New Heavens and New Earth wherein righteousness will reign for eternity.
Revelation 11:15 NAU - "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."