

“The Death of Abner”
2 Samuel 3:17-30
(Preached at Trinity, September 9, 2018)

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. As we've seen, Abner was a pragmatist. He was an ambitious opportunist, full of hypocrisy. He was Saul's faithful general as long as it was to his benefit. After Saul's death, he appeared to be faithful to Ishbosheth; again, as long as it was beneficial. In this chapter we find him defecting to David. His new allegiance to David was only because it suited him. It was to his advantage.
2. David seems enamored by the words of Abner. He made peace with him and held a feast in his honor.
 - A. Joab and his men were not nearly as taken in by the words of Abner. Upon finding out about the agreement between Abner and David, Joab was furious. His immediate response was, "What have you done?" The words imply that David has done something wrong. They were words of accusation. They were the same words Samuel asked of Saul in **1 Samuel 13** before pronouncing that Saul had forfeited the kingdom.
 - B. Joab's words betrayed a lack of respect for David.
 1. This may not seem strange for the modern American. We have little respect for those in authority. We think little of insulting our president. Joab didn't request an audience with the king or even ask to speak with David in private.
 2. His words were rude. He saw himself as being equal with David, or worse, he saw David as his inferior.
 3. His words demonstrated his denial of David's right to rule and his ability to rule.
Contrast the words of Joab with the words of Abner in **Verse 21** where he referred to David as "my lord the king." Even if Abner's words were hypocritical, they demonstrated the right way to approach the king.
 - C. Although David was gaining the throne as king, it would be a long time before he gained respect as king.
2 Samuel 3:39 NAU - "I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruah are too difficult for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil."
3. Joab was about to further demonstrate his lack of respect for David. Going behind David's back, Joab secretly sent messengers to Abner to bring him back to Hebron.
 - A. Abner returned, not suspecting anything malicious. Why should he? David had sent him away in peace. He had assurances from David. Why would he fear to return?

- B. Upon his return to Hebron, Joab met him at the gate and struck him dead as an act of vengeance for the death of his brother, Asahel. Abner never suspected anything until it was too late.
2 Samuel 3:27 NAU - "So when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the middle of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the belly so that he died on account of the blood of Asahel his brother."
- C. It was a cowardly act by Joab.
 Matthew Henry writes: "He did it treacherously, and under pretense of speaking peaceably to him, Deu. 27:24. Had he challenged him, he would have done like a soldier; but to assassinate him was done villainously and like a coward."¹
4. The narrator is supplying us with Joab's excuse for killing Abner—an act of vengeance for his brother's death. He isn't validating Joab's actions—and David surely didn't. Joab's excuse did not fit the criteria for avenging the death of a loved one. Abner killed Asahel during wartime. The avenger of blood concept in Numbers and Deuteronomy did not apply to deaths during war. We must not dismiss Joab's other motives. He was fearful of Abner usurping his own position as general. Abner was Saul's general and now David had made peace with him. Joab's chief motive was advancing his own self-interests.
5. As we will see often in the monarchy of David, his reign serves as a type of Christ and His Kingdom. This is where a knowledge of God's progressive revelation and the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose in Christ is essential.
- A. Nathan spoke to David promising him an everlasting throne. He was speaking of David's son, Solomon, but a much greater Son God would raise up.
2 Samuel 7:12-16 NAU - "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took *it* away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."
- B. Jesus Christ is the Son of David, the righteous King.
Hebrews 1:8 NAS - "But of the Son *He* says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom."
6. We can see several typical points in this text.

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 442.

- I. The King would often be served by those with selfish motives
 - A. This was surely true with David's reign
 1. Abner had his ulterior motives
 - a. His chief interest was not advancing David's kingdom but advancing his own agenda.
 - b. His coming to David was not out of a personal commitment to David but because he had fallen out with Ishbosheth. He was satisfied with advancing Ishbosheth as long as it suited his interests
 2. Joab clearly demonstrated his lack of allegiance to David. He accused Abner of seeking to deceive David and then does the very thing himself. He too had selfish motives in his actions. Solomon would eventually have Joab executed.
1 Kings 2:31 NAU - "fall upon him and bury him, that you may remove from me and from my father's house the blood which Joab shed without cause."
 3. Throughout the reign of David he faced those who were unfaithful and self-serving.
 - B. We need to carefully discern our own hearts.
 1. Both Abner and Joab had greater concern for themselves than for their king. The advancement of David and his kingdom was only valuable insofar as it advanced their own lives.
 2. Do we have these same motives residing in our own hearts? Does love for Jesus and the desire to advance His kingdom govern our actions or do we have our own agenda as our chief guiding force?
 3. Are we willing to serve in the lowly place as long as it exalts Christ? Are we willing to suffer abuse as long as it exalts Christ?
 4. Does our own personal agenda take priority in how we serve Christ?
 5. Pastors need to examine too. It is easy for us to become irritated at our congregation for their lack of service to the church, accusing them of loving their own interests more than those of Christ. But is my love for this church due to my love for Christ, or the impact of this church upon my own life?
 6. Should we not have a desire to see the church of Christ prosper for His sake alone?

- II. The followers of the King often think they know better than the King
Proverbs 16:25 NAU - "There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death."
- A. Joab thought he knew better than his king.
2 Samuel 3:24-25 NAU - "Then Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done?"
1. Joab's words to David were not unlike Abner's words to Ishbosheth. There was no sense of humility before his king. There was no sense of trusting that the king's actions were wise
 2. There is sarcasm in **Verse 25** – "You know Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you. . ." Abner is implying that he knew what David did not know. Joab is implying that Abner had succeeded in deceiving David and that David had been naïve in sending Abner away in peace. He saw David as weak and gullible.
 3. The proper attitude of Joab should have been honor and respect for his king. But all men lust for position. Don't forget our Lord's disciples as they argued who would be greatest in the Kingdom. We want power.
- B. Every act of disobedience to Christ our King is a declaration that we know better than Him.
1. Sin is declaring that we are wiser and our course of action is a much better choice.
 2. Jesus has infinite knowledge of all things. We must trust His wisdom. An interesting note is Joab doesn't seem to know why Abner had come to David—that that he was working to deliver the entire kingdom over to David. Joab was blinded by his own worldview in which his place was paramount. Can you see some of this in yourself?
 3. Jesus said: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments," but how often do we find ways around obeying?
 4. And how often do we complain about our situation in life? We forget that God has ordained every detail of our life. When we complain it is as if we are shouting, "What have you done?"
- III. Those formerly alienated can find peace with God's King
- A. Abner had formerly been against David.
1. Abner put Ishbosheth on the throne in opposition to David. It was treason.
2 Samuel 2:8-9 NAU - "But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. ⁹ He made him king over Gilead"
 2. It was Abner who was the power behind the war in **Verse 1**.
2 Samuel 3:1 NAU - "Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David"
 3. When Abner came to David he might have been treated as an enemy. After all, it was treasonous to set up Saul's son as king when David was God's anointed.

4. When Abner came surrendering to David, instead of a sword he found peace.
 - a. David had a feast prepared for him
2 Samuel 3:20 NAU - "Then Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him."
 - b. David then sent him away in peace
2 Samuel 3:21 NAU - "So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace."

- B. Everyone of us were rebels against King Jesus
 1. We were His enemies. We were as those who shouted, "Away with Him!"
 2. When we came and surrendered ourselves to His Lordship we found peace and reconciliation.
Colossians 1:21-22 NAU - "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--"
 3. Instead of enemies, we are received as friends. Instead of wrath and condemnation we find peace.
Romans 5:1 NAU - "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"
2 Thessalonians 3:16 NAU - "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance."
Hebrews 13:20-21 NAU - "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, ²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen."

IV. The King's ways are that of goodness and righteousness

- A. Joab did what David had refused to do – take personal vengeance
 1. David refused to kill Saul, even though Saul had determined to take David's life.
 2. Through the wise counsel of Abigail and God's Providential constraint, David did not avenge himself on Nabal, thus preserving for himself a righteous kingdom.
1 Samuel 25:32-33 NAU - "Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, ³³ and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand."
1 Samuel 25:30-31 NAU - "And when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, ³¹ this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. "

3. Joab's method of seeking his selfish designs was through deceit and lies. He was ruthless and he was devious. Upon learning of Joab's dastardly act, David immediately disavowed himself of all wrongdoing. John Woodhouse – "The cause of Christ cannot be advanced by "disgraceful, underhanded ways" or "cunning." Like Jesus and his apostle, David immediately and emphatically distanced himself from what Joab had done.²
 4. David declared his kingdom to be a righteous kingdom
2 Samuel 3:28 NAU - "I and my kingdom are innocent before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner."
 - a. The Hebrew word is אָוִן – "guiltless"
 - b. It carries legal overtones. The deeds of Joab would not be attributed to David.
 - c. David pronounced legal judgment upon Joab – Joab would bear his own guilt, but his entire family would suffer.
2 Samuel 3:29 NAU - "May it fall on the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and may there not fail from the house of Joab one who has a discharge, or who is a leper, or who takes hold of a distaff, or who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread."
 - d. Joab was further humiliated by being commanded to join in the mourning for Abner.
- B. Christ's Kingdom is a Kingdom of righteousness
1. Jesus came as our perfect, righteous, high priest
Hebrews 7:26 NAU - "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;"
 2. His Kingdom is a righteous Kingdom
Hebrews 1:8-9 NAS - "But of the Son *He says*, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. ⁹ "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee With the oil of gladness above Thy companions."
 3. Only the righteous will enter into His Kingdom
1 Corinthians 6:9 NAS - "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?"
2 Peter 3:13-14 NAS - "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,"
 4. Ours is an imputed righteousness – the righteousness of our Holy King.

² John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 119.

Conclusion:

1. Although David was a foreshadow of Christ, he was infinitely less than Christ. David was seeking to establish a righteous kingdom, but only Christ's Kingdom is truly righteous.
2. We must also see the infinite difference in power.
 - A. This was early in David's reign and he was quite weak. The reason he cursed Joab instead of bringing him under civil charges is he lacked the power to implement the punishment.
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."
 - B. Jesus reigns with absolute power and authority. Every knee shall bow before His righteous throne. No one shall escape His judgement seat and no one shall escape His sentence. He has the infinite power to judge the nations.
3. Have you bowed before the infinite power and majesty of Christ?