

“Providence and Sin”
2 Samuel 4
(Preached at Trinity, September 16, 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. Throughout 1 & 2 Samuel we've witnessed the amazing work of God's Providence unfolding. We saw it with Samuel entering the priesthood, the death of Eli's sons and the capturing of the Ark of the Covenant. We saw it with the anointing of Saul as king and the rise of David as Israel's future king.
At the end of **1 Samuel** we saw the defeat of Israel by the Philistines and the death of King Saul and three of his sons. It was a terrible day in Israel, but God's purpose was continuing to unfold.
2. The opening words of **2 Samuel** offered words of hope, "Now it came about after the death of Saul . . ." In other words, there was more to follow. God wasn't through. God had promised to remove the kingdom from Saul and give it to David. His purpose was unfolding.
3. As David rested in Ziklag an Amalekite arrived bringing David the bad news. After a period of mourning David was directed to Hebron where he was anointed king over the house of Judah. Saul's general, Abner, had other plans and placed Saul's remaining son, Ishbosheth, upon the throne as king over Israel.
But wait a minute. Wasn't David anointed king over all Israel? How would this be accomplished?
4. Abner soon defected from Ishbosheth and went to David, but Joab in a rage of vengeance killed him. David did not have the power to resist Joab and his army.
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."
5. So this is how **Chapter 3** ended. David is king over Judah but doesn't have full control over his own army. David's power was limited, but the narrator wants us to understand the total weakness of Saul's house. Ishbosheth is king over Israel but **Verse 1** tells us after the death of Abner he lost all courage. He also mentions the only other surviving member of Saul's house, Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan who was crippled. At around 12 years old, he would have been too young to rule and unable to fight when he got older. Saul's house was powerless.
With all of Saul's scheming to make himself great and his kingdom enduring this is what he got. He is dead. Three of his sons, potential heirs to the throne, are dead. His remaining son has lost all courage, and the heir of Jonathan is a helpless cripple. The schemes of man without God will end in failure.

6. As we enter **Chapter 4** an event happens that will suddenly change everything. The death of Abner upset the balance of power in Israel.
- A. Two men, Ishbosheth's captains, come up with a scheme. Once again, we find the vain schemes of men. Knowing that Ishbosheth's chances of maintaining his throne are few, they come up with an idea to win the heart of David.
 - B. One afternoon while Ishbosheth was resting these two captains enter his room secretly and stabbed him to death. Typical of Hebrew writing, it is repeated again in **Verse 7** with greater detail. They stabbed him in the belly and then cut off his head. They then brought his head to David. The journey would have taken them at least two days.
You can imagine how pleased they were with the success of their scheme. They had justified their treason, justified the murder of their king, and now they were joyously taking his head to David.
 - C. As with the opportunist Amalekite of **Chapter 1**, they vainly thought David would react favorably when he heard they had removed the rival king. And like the Amalekite, they thought wrongly.
We have irony working here because while they thought to receive reward for their actions, instead they received execution – **Verses 10-12**.
 - D. Once again, we witness the actions of a just king. David executed them for their murder of Ishbosheth.
7. This turn of events was the means by which David was finally made king over all Israel. **2 Samuel 5:3 NAU** - "So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel."
8. It was by God's Providence that the reign of Ishbosheth ended thus opening the way for David to ascend to the throne. God was advancing His Kingdom. We might also see that this was God's continuing judgment upon the house of Saul. But was it God's purpose that Ishbosheth was murdered and beheaded? Did God ordain this act of sin? This chapter gives us the opportunity to examine once again the mystery of God's providence.
As we teach the sovereignty of God two questions are frequently asked:
(1) If God has ordained all things from the beginning to the end, including the sinful acts of men, how can we then say that God is not the author of sin?
(2) If God has ordained all things from the beginning to the end, including the sinful acts of men, how can He then hold men accountable for their actions?
9. On one hand, God is transcendent, above and apart from creation. On the other hand, God is very much involved in the affairs of creation. In fact, He has ordered all things and is governing every event in time.
- A. God's ordering of every event in history is called His decree. Before the world began He foreordained whatever comes to pass.
LBC – 3:1 Of God's Decree – "God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass . . ."

- B. God working out His decree in time is called Providence. Providence is God's governing of all things.
LBC – 5:1 Of Divine Providence – “God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will . . .”
10. The mystery is that God orders all things to the last detail in such a way as to allow man freedom of volition.
- A. Although God is sovereign and has determined whatsoever comes to pass no compulsion is laid upon men to commit their sinful acts
1. God's decree does not take away man's liberty
 2. Loraine Boettner – “Adam acted as freely as if there had been no decree, and yet as infallibly as if there had been no liberty”
- B. In other words, from our perspective we do what we desire to do. Our actions are often sinful and our sinful actions are consistent with God's decree and yet the sin is our own. God is not the author of sin. God ordains the action and judges the sin.
LBC – 3:1 Of God's Decree – “God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature . . .”
- I. God's Providence works out in a daily drama in countless ways
- A. From our perspective it all seems so normal
1. Each day unfolds for billions of people across the face of the earth
 2. We all make countless daily decisions. We consider the circumstance, weigh our options, and make our decision.
 3. For most, the decision is measured by how it works to their advantage, even if it demands manipulation of the circumstance in sinful ways.
 4. In Chapter 1 we saw the Amalekite who came to David with the royal crown and bracelet and a story of having taken the life of Saul. I labeled him as an opportunist man-pleaser. He sought to manipulate the circumstances to his advantage using lies and deception. David had him executed.
 5. Although his actions were wicked and displayed a wicked heart, his actions fulfilled the Divine purpose of God.
 God's purpose was fulfilled and His holiness remained untainted.
 Man's wickedness will never thwart God's Kingdom. Instead, God uses even the wickedness of men's hearts as He does His holy will.
- B. The best account that demonstrates God's Divine purpose working through the sinful actions of man is the arrest and crucifixion of Christ.
Acts 4:26-28 NAS - "The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord, and against His Christ.' ²⁷
 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur."

1. Judas Iscariot was a greedy opportunist and betrayed Christ. He acted in a manner consistent with his sinful heart. His sin was his own—and yet, he perfectly fulfilled God’s Divine purpose. It is interesting how often we see in Scripture God using the sinful greed of men in accomplishing His purpose.
2. The religious leaders were governed by their lust for power and their envy of Christ. Their sin was their own, and yet they perfectly accomplished God’s Divine purpose.
3. Pontius Pilate was a man-pleaser lacking the moral fortitude to release a guiltless man. His sin was his own and yet, he perfectly fulfilled God’s Divine purpose.
“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.”
4. Each of these men fulfilled their role in the drama of the crucifixion, but from their perspective, they were doing precisely what they wanted to do.

II. **Chapter 4** is a drama that has been repeated in countless ways throughout history

A. It involved men who sought to manipulate circumstances to their advantage

1. Abner was dead. Ishbosheth was a weak king. People were nervous.
2. You can imagine Baanah and Rechab talking between themselves, scheming and forging a plan.
Did they consider that their plan involved murder? They must have felt the murder was justified. After all, Ishbosheth was an ineffective king. Wouldn’t David commend them?
3. What about Ishbosheth? He awakened to the day like so many before. He had breakfast and dressed for the day. Perhaps he conducted kingly business. Then he retired to take an afternoon nap. Everything was normal. He never thought it was his last day. The same was true with Abner. He made his plan, brought it to David and thought all had gone splendidly. He had no idea that it would be his final day upon the earth.

Proverbs 27:1 NAU - "Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth."

James 4:13-15 NAU - "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

Psalms 39:4-5 NAU - "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am. ⁵ "Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. "

- B. Their deeds were sinful and they will bear their guilt – and yet, they perfectly accomplished God’s will

LBC – 5:4 *Of Divine Providence* – “The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that his determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also he most wisely and powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth, in a manifold dispensation to his most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.”

1. Every decision, every action serves to fulfill the purpose of God
2. God ordains even the actions of wicked men for His own purpose
Yet their sin is their own – they made the decision to sin. It was their own wicked heart that brought them to the sinful conclusion.
3. Their actions were the means God ordained to advance David to the throne. But it in no way diminished the sinfulness of their deed. And David made them pay. – **Verses 9-12**

Conclusion:

1. God ordains all things. He is working out His purpose. This gives us great comfort as we consider His eternal redemptive purpose. He is saving His own. Not a single one will be lost. God uses even the sinful actions of men in bringing to pass His purpose.
2. It should also serve as a great warning to us as we labor for Christ. There is always a temptation to rest upon our own scheming as we bring the Gospel to the lost. And far too often men will use unbiblical means in building the church. God doesn’t need our schemes. Notice the vanity of these two opportunists. They believed they were helping God.
2 Samuel 4:8 NAU - "Behold, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; thus the LORD has given my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and his descendants."
3. Success must only be measured by the test of faithfulness to God.
John Woodhouse writes well: “Christian reader, take heed. Never compromise righteousness, even when you imagine that good will come of some unrighteous action. I doubt that you will be tempted to think that an assassination is called for to advance the gospel. But in our own day it is more common than we like to think for Christians to try to advance God’s kingdom by disgraceful and unworthy means. Be sure that you love righteousness more than success.”¹
4. Consider well the old proverb, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

¹ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 137.