

Introduction

A series of civil wars which took place in England during the fifteenth century; they were called the Wars of the Roses. The wars were fought between two competing royal houses to determine who would be king. The house of York bore the emblem of a white rose and the house of Lancaster bore the emblem of a red rose. The wars went on for a period of some thirty years with much bloodshed and carnage with kings trading the throne back and forth. Finally, a decisive battle was won by Henry Tudor. He hailed from the house of Lancaster. Upon being crowned, however, he married Elizabeth of York to merge the two houses together and bring the Wars of the Roses to a stop. A new emblem was adopted consisting of the white rose of York inside the red rose of Lancaster.

Such a merger was not going to take place in Israel a thousand years or so BC. Although David was married to the daughter of Saul, God had anointed David and his dynasty to replace that of Saul. There was war and carnage that led to the gradual decline of the house of Saul. And this morning we will see how finally it all came crashing down.

[Read text and Pray]

Back in chapter 3 the narrator had indicated to us that David was growing stronger and stronger while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker. In chapter 4, the house of Saul finally runs completely out of steam. It comes to a full and complete collapse. The implosion of the house of Saul sets the stage for the remaining territories of Israel to come and submit themselves to David to be subject to him as their king. We will get to that next week. Today, we focus on the collapse itself.

At the outset of the chapter, we are presented with a picture of . . .

I. The Weakness of Saul's House.

Last week we spent a lot of time talking about Abner because, well, the bulk of chapters 2 and 3 are about Abner. Remember, he was the former commander of the armies of Saul. When Saul died, he TOOK Ishbosheth, Saul's son, and made him king over Israel. The language even depicts the idea that he was propping up Ishbosheth. Abner was the one in charge. Ishbosheth was the tool. So when Abner determined to go to David and make a covenant to join together David's Judah with the rest of Israel, and when he was killed there by Joab, there was a power vacuum.

Verse 4 tells us that there did exist one more direct descendant of Saul. He was Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan. However, Mephibosheth was crippled from a childhood accident and was lame. He just does not fit the profile for a king and wasn't even considered for the role. He provides a picture of the now pitifully debilitated house of Saul. There is Ishbosheth the puppet now left on his own and Mephibosheth the man incapacitated from childhood.

The mood in Israel was glum. When Abner did not return from his visit to Hebron and Ishbosheth learned that Abner had died there, what courage he had was blown to smithereens. The text says that his courage failed. Perhaps he thought that David had orchestrated the killing of Abner. Perhaps he thought that he would be next, that David would send Joab and the troops against him. If so, it would seem that there was not a glimmer of hope even for a peaceful merger under the house of David. It would undoubtedly mean death for him. And the dread that filled the heart of Ishbosheth filtered down to the tribes under his crown. "All Israel was dismayed." Likely they had

not heard of the response of David to Abner's murder. All they knew was he was dead and figured they must be next. Saul's house was now nothing but a shell.

I think the only conclusion we can draw from the text is that Ishbosheth was consumed with dread. His only expectation was for bad things to happen. And what did he do? He went to bed. We learn from the text that he was taking, as was his custom his noonday rest. He went to sleep. Sleep is often what people turn to when they are depressed. And apparently it was a custom to take a nap in the middle of the day. However, the fact that it is mentioned here is not only a setup for his murder, it is also an indication of what Ishbosheth did not do. He did not turn to God; he turned to his bed. Like Jonah, he tried to hide from the fear of resisting God by sleeping. Newsflash: sleep does not make problems go away. We all need a healthy amount of sleep, but we cannot escape from dread by sleeping. When David was on the run from Saul, he did not try to sleep himself into a false reality.

What should you do when it feels like the world is against you and there is no hope things will improve? Go to sleep? Try to hide? Try to make yourself FEEL like all is well? Paul gives us the remedy in the New Testament. He writes the Philippians in 4:6 this directive: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." How shall we face fear and anxiety-inducing and depression-inducing circumstances? PRAY.

First, repent. I mean Ishbosheth was on the wrong side. He was resisting the purpose and plan of God. If he had gone to God and submitted himself to David, things would be completely different at this point. The first thing would be to pray a prayer of repentance for his sin against God. Here is the great need of every human being because we are all born on the wrong side. We are all born with a heart that resists the plan and purpose and holiness of God. If we do not repent and submit to God's appointed king, Jesus, then we will all perish. Until we repent and trust in Christ, anxiety is about the only legitimate sensation we can experience in our lives. But coming to him is all about peace—peace with God through reconciliation and peace within because if we have peace with God, we have nothing to fear. So here is how to handle anxiety: repent and pray.

We turn back to Israel back in the day. In the midst of the absence of courage and the presence of dismay, we are introduced to two brothers. The narrator is determined that we understand where they come from and who they are. They are not from Judah. They are not emissaries of David. No. They hail from Saul's own tribe of Benjamin. Baanah and Rechab are sons of Rimmon. Though they are from Beeroth, they are Benjamites. Beeroth is counted part of Benjamin. And even if they lived in Gittaim, they hail from Beeroth and are Benjamites. In other words here are two guys who come not from Judah but from the northern tribes committed to the house of Saul and not only that, they are from Saul's own tribe. They do NOT represent a conspiracy from the outside and most importantly a conspiracy NOT from the house of David. They appear ready to do something about the fear and dismay that fills the land. They have a plan.

We turn next to . . .

II. The Murder of Saul's Son

The plan of the two sons of Rimmon is to remove the puppet. They will take the severed head of Ishbosheth to David. This will please David, avert more war, accomplish the plan of God, and hopefully result in favor being shown by David to them.

So Rechab and Baanah set out. Coming to Mahanaim, "Two Camps," they arrive seemingly according to plan during the heat of the day. It was siesta time, and security was lacking. They pretended to go into the house to obtain wheat, but diverted into the king's bedroom and killed him while he slept. The two brothers desire an appearance of power to impress but they have attacked a man at his weakest moment and have done so by invading his own house.

They have done what we have seen everyone besides David do in this long saga. They have taken matters into their own hands with a desire for recognition for their accomplishment. While others feared and trembled or feared and sought to escape the anxiety, the two sons of Rimmon sought to be heroes. But they were seeking to deal with the fear through their own strength and with their own selfish designs. They took advantage of the situation for their own personal advancement. They did not wait on the Lord.

When you are anxious and surrounded by fear and unrest, we have already noted that it does no good to wallow in your fear. As we look at the sons of Rimmon, we must say that it also does no good to proceed down a path of self-dependency and sin.

In the midst of a financial crisis, you don't help the situation by stealing or cheating or keeping from God what is his. A student concerned for passing an exam is not to be congratulated if he resorted to cheating. It is a sinful lack of trust when a candidate pining for employment lies on the resume. A desperate single person must not seek to solve the pain of singleness by marrying an unbeliever. A frustrated husband or wife who manipulates the behavior they want out of their spouse is taking the path of self-dependency and the results are fake. The same goes for friendships. Parents whose children misbehave do not parent well through impatience and violence whether physical or verbal. Angry retaliation does not accomplish the purpose of God. God's word is filled with instruction for how to handle troubling adversities and anxious circumstances. Prayer along with trusting obedience is the God-honoring and soul-calming way to respond. Such is not the path that was taken by the sons of Rimmon. Taking matters into their own hands and according to their own plans, they committed treacherous murder.

But that is not the way they saw it. Let's look next at . . .

III. The Explanation of Rimmon's Sons

Rechab and Baanah sever the head of Ishbosheth and escape from Mahanaim. They make their way traveling even at night southward by the way of the Arabah. And at last they came to Hebron. They were there to see David. Clearly, they were there to be rewarded. Presenting him with the head of Ishbosheth, the two sons of Rimmon demonstrate that David's rival for the throne of Israel is dead. Let's look again at verse 8 where we find the theological commentary that the two brothers offer in order to explain themselves.

They reported: "Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring."

We did the work of God for you! The claim of the brothers is the vengeance due David for the fact that Saul sought his life has now been accomplished. The Lord accomplished it through them. They had committed murder but they claimed they were justified in doing so because of the result. David's enemy has been eliminated. "That no doubt is what God wanted so what we did is right." Clearly there is the veiled suggestion that they should be rewarded. Some people have a clever way with words. One of them is commentator Dale Davis. I want to share with you his description of the situation. He writes, Rechab and Baanah "come with blood on their hands but theology on their lips,

expecting the latter will magically bleach the former. Murder always seems more pleasant when wrapped in religious considerations" (53). For these guys and people like them, "theology is not truth that lures us to worship God but technique that enables us to justify ourselves" (53).

It is true that God works even through the sins of people. However, it is not true that God approves of the godless and sinful methods of those people. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. He was taken down into Egypt and a false accusation landed Joseph in prison. Nevertheless after many years he became the prime minister to Pharaoh. When the great famine occurred, those brothers came to Egypt to purchase food and found themselves face-to-face with this brother they had treated so contemptuously. They were afraid he would take vengeance on them for the evil they had done to him, but he assured them he would not. Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Joseph recognized that God was working good even for and through the brothers who sinned against him. And Joseph is not going to harbor personal offense against the brothers. But Joseph NEVER speaks approvingly of what they did. It is true that God works all things together for good to those who love him. But it is never true that God approves of the evil that people do even though he uses it for good for those who are his. And you and I cannot afford to invoke the sovereignty of God in order to legitimize our sins.

There are right ways and wrong ways to fulfill the purposes of God. Rechab and Baanah set before us a wrong way. To them the end justified the means. But it is not that way with God. The end does not justify the means. For those who act on that basis, it is not going to turn out well. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, and you can't accomplish that purpose in your life in unholy ways. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it to the glory of God. It is not just the accomplishment but also the way in which you accomplish what you do that matters to God.

Taking matters into your own hand not only fails to please God. It also fails to exhibit trust in God. It is like when Saul was facing the growing angst of his armies when they were preparing to meet the Philistines in battle. Saul was supposed to wait for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifice. But Saul grew impatient and offered the sacrifice himself. His explanation to Samuel was that his armies were scattering, the Philistines were gathering, Samuel seemed to be running late, and he had not sought the favor of the Lord, so he forced himself and offered the burnt offering. Saul did not trust the Lord. A failure to obey is a failure to trust. Obedience reflects that you take God's instructions seriously. You believe what God has instructed you to do is of the utmost importance, and if you will just do what he says, he will take care of all of the other stuff. Seek first his kingdom AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, and all these things will be added to you.

We turn now from the explanation of the sons of Rimmon to . . .

IV. The Righteous Response of David

Here the narrator reminds us that these sons of Rimmon were not from Judah. In fact they came from the very same tribe as the house of Saul. They were Benjamites. And as we learned back in verse 2, they were captains under Ishbosheth himself. The point of emphasis is that David had nothing, absolutely NOTHING, to do with the actions of these men. It was not David who reached for power. David was not trying to take Israel by force. He does not see Ishbosheth as the Lord's anointed. But neither is he hunting him down. It is clear that David is waiting on God to bring the two camps together. And this fact resonates in David's first statement to the Rimmon boys.

We need to stop and absorb this statement of David. His reply began like this: "As the LORD lives who has redeemed my life out of every adversity." Before he goes on to declare what he is going to do with the sons of Rimmon, David would have them know that the way he operates is completely in contrast to what they have done. They took matters in their own hands. They violated the law of God with the assumption that the end justified their violation. Their action was a dramatic illustration of a lack of faith. They didn't wallow in their dismay like the rest of Israel, and they didn't try to escape their anxiety, but they didn't really turn to the Lord either. They put their trust in their own understanding and exploits and acted in their own best interest in opposition to the law of God.

That is NOT how David was operating. While everybody around him is taking matters in their own hands, David is simply trusting in the Lord. He is seeking to be obedient to the Lord, and he can boldly state that the Lord has redeemed his life out of every adversity. The psalms reflect such trust. Consider, for example what David wrote in Psalm 27.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Do you find yourself in a situation of adversity this morning? And who doesn't? May be major and it may be minor, but what is it that is adverse to you this morning? I want you to be so helped by David's example that you determine not to wallow in your anxiety and not to act irrationally in a sinful way, but to submit yourself in trust to the will of God, knowing that he redeems his children out of every adversity. He protects and preserves his people through faith and obedience to him. Now I did not say he eliminates all your adversities. What I am saying is he delivers you from them. They will not overtake you; he will bring you through.

David has demonstrated his trust by behaving with consistency toward people who thought they were bringing him good news but whose news was of sinfully trying to take hold of the kingdom. It happened when the Amalekite thought David would be pleased by the news (although false) that he had helped Saul terminate his life. Rather, David brought justice on him and killed him for his testimony that he had killed the Lord's anointed. Now David says, "How much more when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed." David exacted justice on the

murderers and had the brothers slain then hanged by the pool at Hebron. Meanwhile he had the head of Ishbosheth buried in the tomb of Abner at Hebron. His actions demonstrated that he completely deplored the wickedness of these brothers. He could not rejoice in unrighteousness. He was proving to be a king that those other tribes to the north could warm up to, could trust and could follow.

David acts consistently as king in line with justice. He may seem brutal but for his day and time, David's actions were just. Justice renders the appropriate sentence to evil deeds. Justice demands retribution for wrongs. As king, David is in the position to render justice and he does. David's consistent and resolute justice should encourage our hearts. It is a contrast to the injustice we observe at every turn in our day.

David points us to the justice of God. He will not leave the guilty unpunished. What then? Must we all receive justice? For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Justice is what we all deserve. But praise God he supplied His holy and infinite Son as a propitiation for the sins of others, for our sins. He is thereby just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

But for those who are not in Christ justice will mean eternal death, punishment meted out upon them for all eternity, for there is no other sentence which can suffice for the terrible offense that sin is to God. The wrath of God is the just response of a holy God to sin. He will not deny himself and he will not fail to be just. But there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose ALL their guilty stains. If you would escape the wrath you deserve, you must turn to Jesus as your Savior. Trust him who bore the wrath of God as a substitute for sinners and you will be saved.

Conclusion

Here at the end, I want to return to the beginning of the text. There we were told that all Israel was dismayed as they learned of the death of the man who was the actual leader in their land. It seems to me they must have thought David was going to take matters into his own hands and forcibly conquer them and tyrannize them brutally for the fact that they had not already submitted to him. They could see him being to them like Pharaoh had become to the Israelites in Egypt before the exodus. They assume David will behave like other kings tend to behave. Upon hearing these details that David has had NOTHING to do with taking matters into his hands, that he has been consistent in dealing out justice, that he deplores the methods of the Amalekite and Joab and now the Rimmon brothers—upon hearing these details perhaps they can begin to see that David is not a king about whom to be dismayed but a king who deserves to be honored, a king who is worthy of the title, a king who will rule with kindness and care but also unflinching justice, who is not in this for his own selfish designs but who is in it for God and therefore can care properly for his people.

In this way David surely depicts for us the nature of his greater son Jesus. He does not force people into his kingdom. He calls people willingly to come. He calls them to willingly deny themselves take up their crosses and follow him. He calls them to receive him through grace. He calls them to submit but it is a beneficial submission. What he wants for them is what is truly best for them. He destroys injustice and enacts the justice of God. He is the kind of king who loves his people and serves their best interests. He knows what's best and commands what is best. He does not tyrannize in order to use but he rules in order to bless. He rules in justice and righteousness. Wickedness will be punished and banished from his realm. And glory, the glory of God will forever shine upon his people.