

The Life of David

David Mourns Abner

2 Samuel 3:22-39

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Scripture

After the death of King Saul (1:1), David was anointed as king over the tribe of Judah in the city of Hebron (2:4). Saul's surviving son, Ish-bosheth, was set up as a puppet king over "all Israel" in the north by Abner, Saul's military general who had survived the battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (2:8-9). General Abner and David's commanding general, Joab, had tried to resolve the situation between the two sides (2:12-32). Unfortunately, their solution did not work, and this led to war (2:17), "a long war" (3:1), between the two sides. On the first day of the battle, Abner killed Joab's brother, Asahel (2:23). It is clear that Abner did not want to kill Asahel, but Asahel would not stop pursuing Abner, and so Abner reluctantly killed Asahel on the battle field.

After about seven and a half years (2:11), there was a falling out between Ish-bosheth and Abner (3:6-11). Abner decided to transfer his allegiance to David in Hebron, with the promise that he would bring all Israel with him over to David (3:12-21). Remarkably, David met with Abner, enjoyed a feast with him, and sent him back to Israel "in peace" (3:21). David was seeking to establish God's kingdom of peace on earth.

However, David's general, Joab, was not present when all of this occurred. He was not at all happy to hear what David had done. In fact, he deceptively called for Abner to return to Hebron, and then he and Abishai murdered Abner in cold blood.

Let's read about David mourning for Abner in 2 Samuel 3:22-39:

²²Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he

had gone in peace. ²³ When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, “Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace.” ²⁴ Then Joab went to the king and said, “What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? ²⁵ You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing.”

²⁶ When Joab came out from David’s presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know about it. ²⁷ And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. ²⁸ Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, “I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. ²⁹ May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father’s house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle or who falls by the sword or who lacks bread!” ³⁰ So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon.

³¹ Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, “Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner.” And King David followed the bier. ³² They buried Abner at Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. ³³ And the king lamented for Abner, saying,

“Should Abner die as a fool dies?
³⁴ Your hands were not bound;
your feet were not fettered;
as one falls before the wicked
you have fallen.”

And all the people wept again over him. ³⁵ Then all the

people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was yet day. But David swore, saying, “God do so to me and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!”³⁶ And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people.³⁷ So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king’s will to put to death Abner the son of Ner.³⁸ And the king said to his servants, “Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?”³⁹ And I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruah, are more severe than I. The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!” (2 Samuel 3:22-39)

Introduction

In his commentary on Second Samuel, commentator John Woodhouse notes that Mahatma Gandhi is reported to have said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”¹

I am not sure that Mahatma Gandhi really had a clear understanding of Christ. But he did have some understanding and knowledge of Christians. And we acknowledge that there is truth in the statement that we Christians are so unlike our Christ.

The fact is that Jesus Christ is perfect, and we are not. Yes, Christians are forgiven, Christians have been regenerated, Christians have been given new natures, and Christians are being transformed. Nevertheless, Christians are not yet perfect. Moreover, Christians will not be perfect until we reach glory.

We also need to assert that the advancement of the kingdom of God depends upon Christ and not on Christians. Yes, it is true that Christians are citizens of the kingdom of God, and we represent King Jesus, and we are to call others to join the kingdom of God. But, at the end of the day, we point people to Christ—and

¹ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 113.

not to Christians—as the only one who is able to forgive, regenerate, receive, and transform non-Christians into his kingdom.

God’s visible kingdom on earth was established when David began his rule as king, first over the house of Judah and later over all Israel. David’s kingdom foreshadowed the kingdom of Christ.

In today’s text, we see how Joab—much like Christians who are so unlike their Christ—behaved in way so very unlike his king. But our focus is going to be on David and the attributes that he demonstrated as God’s king on earth.

Lesson

Second Samuel 3:22-39 shows us attributes that belong to God’s king.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. God’s King Is Peaceful (3:22-23)
2. God’s King Is Innocent (3:24-30, 37)
3. God’s King Is Good (3:31-36)
4. God’s King Is Gracious (3:38)
5. God’s King Is Gentle (3:39)

I. God’s King Is Peaceful (3:22-23)

First, God’s king is peaceful.

As I mentioned earlier, there was a falling out between King Ish-bosheth of Israel and General Abner. Abner decided to transfer his allegiance to David in Hebron, and promised David that he would bring all Israel with him over to David. David met with Abner and his twenty men in Hebron, and had a feast with them. Abner affirmed that he would bring all Israel to David. So, So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace (3:21b).

Verse 22 says that Joab, David’s general, then returned from a raid: **“But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for he had**

sent him away, and he had gone in peace.” Moreover, in verse 23 we read, **“When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, ‘Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace.’ ”**

Three times in three verses—in verses 21, 22, and 23—we read that Abner was sent on his way by David **“in peace.”** David was in the process of his establishing his kingdom. And he was seeking to unite the two divided factions, Israel and Judah. When Abner came to David with the promise to help unite the two houses, David extended his peace to Abner. The conflict that had existed between them had now ceased. Instead of conflict there was now peace, as David received Abner into his fellowship.

Friends, David points us to Jesus. Prior to our conversion, we were in conflict with Jesus. We were at war with him. We were on opposite sides as we were in the kingdom of Satan and Jesus was of course in the kingdom of God. But then Jesus reconciled us to himself and to God. He extended his peace to us. And we now live in peace with Christ, our king.

So, let me ask you: Are you “in peace” with Christ? Do you belong to him? Have you transferred your allegiance from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God?

II. God’s King Is Innocent (3:24-30, 37)

Second, God’s king is innocent.

When Joab heard that Abner had been in Hebron, had a meal with David, had made an agreement with David to bring all Israel into the kingdom, and then had just left, he **went to the king and said, “What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing”** (3:24-25). Even though Joab was David’s

nephew, and even though Joab was David's general, his words to David were incredibly inappropriate. As one commentator said, "These are the words of an accuser to an accused."² Joab was utterly disrespectful to his sovereign, King David.

The Bible does not say what David's response was to Joab. Nevertheless, Joab, unknown to David, sent messengers after Abner and summoned him back to Hebron. Abner returned and Joab took him aside and **struck him in the stomach, so that he died**, and, as the text says, he did so **"for the blood of Asahel his brother"** (3:27b). Keep in mind that Asahel was killed on the battlefield, and while that was a terrible loss to Joab and his family, there was nothing improper about Asahel's death. On the other hand, Joab simply murdered Abner. Moreover, Joab accused David of being deceived by Abner, which was not true. But Joab deceived Abner into returning to Hebron and murdering him there. And what makes this even more egregious is that Hebron was a "city of refuge," a city where an accused murderer would be allowed to dwell in safety while he was on trial for murder.

Obviously, David heard what Joab did to Abner. He immediately wanted to make it clear to everyone that he was innocent. He had nothing whatsoever to do with Abner's death. Indeed, he was not even aware of Joab's intentions. That is why he said in verse 28, **"I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner the son of Ner."**

David then commanded Joab to join him in mourning publicly for Abner. When the people of Judah and Israel saw David's reaction to Abner's death, the text says in verse 37, **"So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner."**

David was innocent of all wrongdoing. Joab claimed that David had been deceived by Abner. But that was not the case. In fact, it was Joab who was the deceiver. David was innocent, and all the

² John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, 117.

people understood that David was innocent.

David's innocence—at least in this instance—also points us to Jesus' innocence. In fact, whereas David was actually a sinful person (and he would affirm that in Psalm 51), Jesus was never sinful at all in his entire life. That is why Jesus is the perfect, innocent lamb of God who is able to pay the penalty for all our sin.

III. God's King Is Good (3:31-36)

Third, God's king is good.

Verses 31-32 say, **“Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, ‘Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner.’ And King David followed the bier. They buried Abner at Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept.”** Interestingly, this is the first time in all Scripture that David is referred to as **“King David.”** David was leading the mourners in his official capacity as king over all his people.

Moreover, the text says that **“they buried Abner at Hebron.”** He was not taken back to his home, which would have been in the territory of Benjamin. Instead, Abner was buried **“at Hebron.”** Abner had changed allegiance. Burial at Hebron signified his new—albeit short—relationship to his new king at Hebron.

David made sure that Joab joined the public in mourning for Abner. And David himself led the way in mourning for one to whom he had extended his peace. In addition, David lamented for Abner and fasted for Abner. It is clear that these tears were not for public show, but they were tears of genuine sorrow.

Then, we read in verse 36, **“And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people.”** The Hebrew word for **“pleased”** may also be translated as “good.” So, the *Lexham English Bible* translates verse 36 as follows, “All the people noticed, and it was *good* in their

eyes, as everything that the king did was *good* in the eyes of all the people.”

The people saw that their king, David, was good. As they saw how he led them in mourning over the loss of one to whom peace had been granted, one to whom David had shown steadfast love and kindness and faithfulness, they were pleased.

David pointed his people—and us—to the true king, King Jesus. Jesus is good. He is always good. He never ever does anything but good to and for his people. By his life and example Jesus shows us how to live. All that King Jesus does is pleasing to his people.

Do you find that everything that Jesus does is good? Or do you find yourself ever questioning the goodness of Jesus?

IV. God’s King Is Gracious (3:38)

Fourth, God’s king is gracious.

David then turned and spoke to a smaller group of people. He wanted to stress something to them. **And the king said to his servants, “Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?”** (3:38). The term “prince” in this verse does not necessarily mean royalty. In fact, in verse 8 of chapter 2 it is translated as “commander.” We sometimes use the expression “a prince of a man” to refer to someone who is “regal, great, a leader.” Most likely David is saying, “Don’t you know that a leader, a great man, has fallen in Israel today.”

Now, we must understand these words in their context. David’s lament for Abner was similar to his lament for Saul: they were unqualified positive words about these men, even though both of them had earlier tried to have David killed. Woodhouse notes, “David was responding to the death of one who could have been regarded as his enemy by seeing the tragedy of his death. The tragedy of death lies in the good that has been lost. David recognized

and gave words to what had been good in Abner.”³

David extended grace toward Abner when he came to him seeking reconciliation. David sent Abner away “in peace,” which the author of Second Samuel noted three times (3:21, 22, 23). King David was showing himself to be a gracious king to those who came to him seeking reconciliation.

Again, David points us to King Jesus. Jesus is a gracious king. He delights to extend his grace to each person who comes to him seeking to be reconciled with him.

Do you want to be reconciled with King Jesus? Know that he is a gracious king, and he will extend his grace to you in salvation when you cry out to him in repentance and faith.

V. God’s King Is Gentle (3:39)

And finally, God’s king is gentle.

David went on to say in verse 39a, **“And I was gentle today, though anointed king.”** I am not sure why the translators put down **“*though* anointed king.”** The Hebrew text literally says, **“...*and* anointed king.”** He had been anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel when he was just a teenager (1 Samuel 16:13), and he had also been anointed king over Judah seven and a half years earlier (2 Samuel 2:7). He was indeed God’s king on earth.

David’s point is that while he was king, and could have taken strong action, he was in fact **“gentle.”** Sometimes, gentleness was seen as weakness (as in Genesis 33:13; Deuteronomy 20:8). But, in context, David’s gentleness is in contrast to the unbridled toughness of Joab and Abishai. That is why David went on to say, **“These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I”** (3:39b). They wanted to kill, whereas David wanted to preserve life. He was gentle, whereas they were severe.

Other than make Joab participate in the public mourning of

³ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, 124.

Abner, David did not take any further action against Joab and Abishai. Some commentators see that as weakness. But, I think it is David's gentleness, which in reality, is a strength. On this occasion David handed them over to the Lord for judgment when he said, **"The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!"** (3:39c).

David was gentle toward Joab and Abishai. It takes great strength to be gentle. Whereas Joab and Abishai were cold-blooded murderers, David was not. And even though he could have ordered them to stand trial for murder (and perhaps should have), in this instance he left vengeance to the Lord.

David again points us to his Greater Son, Jesus. Just as King David was gentle, so King Jesus is gentle. In one of the most beautiful of all invitations, Jesus said in Matthew 11:28–29, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Are you weary? Are you heavy laden with sin and guilt? O, come to Jesus. He *is* gentle. And you will find rest for your soul.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David mourning for Abner in 2 Samuel 3:22-39, let us point people to King Jesus, and strive to live as sons and daughters of our king.

Friends, this text reminds us that we serve a perfect king. Oh yes, we are not perfect. But he is perfect. King Jesus is peaceful, innocent, good, gracious, and gentle. Let us point people to King Jesus, and strive to live as sons and daughters of our king. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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