

“Comprehending Redemption”
2 Samuel 21:6-14
(Preached at Trinity, February 23, 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. **Chapter 21** sets before us one of the most difficult of all the Biblical narratives. It is difficult for us to reconcile the actions of the various parties in this story - the request of the Gibeonites and David's fulfillment of their request.
2. It seems unthinkable that these seven young men were selected and executed. Five from one family and two from another. We know little of them, only that five were grandsons of Saul, the sons of Merab, Saul's daughter. The other two were the sons Saul born to his concubine, Rizpah.
3. We are introduced to Rizpah back in **Chapter 3**. We are told that she was the concubine of Saul and in **Chapter 3** she was at the center of the power struggle between Abner and Ish-bosheth.
2 Samuel 3:7 NAU - "Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah; and Ish-bosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?"
We are told in this passage that she had two sons. They would have been the half-brothers of Jonathan.
4. We are given some information regarding their execution, but many details are withheld. We are told they were executed at the hands of the Gibeonites, they were hanged together, and that it was at the beginning of the barley harvest, but being during famine, there was little being harvested.
The word for "hanged" is indefinite. It literally means "exposed." The Septuagint translates it with a word meaning "hanged in the sun" suggesting perhaps that they were crucified.
5. The barley harvest was in April. If the "rain" in **Verse 10** is referring to the autumn rains it would have been around October, suggesting they hung for over six months.
2 Samuel 21:10 NAU - "And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until it rained on them from the sky; and she allowed neither the birds of the sky to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night."
6. For all these endless months she presided over the decaying, rotting corpses, protecting them from the predators. It is one of the most pathetic, heart wrenching scenes in all the Bible. We witness the boundless love of a mother for her children. But this scene goes far beyond the common experience.
We can understand sorrow and grief. We can understand the heartache that surrounds death, even the death of a child. But what we see displayed is something we find hard to comprehend.

7. I think that's the point the narrator is seeking to convey. It isn't meant to fit into any nice categories. This can be frustrating for the preacher.
- A. The work of the pastor/preacher is to take the text, unfold the meaning in its Biblical and historical context and then apply it to the present lives of his hearers.
- One expositor says the text reminds us that we shouldn't be swallowed up on inordinate grief.
 - Another reminds us of the importance of covenant keeping? The contrast between Saul and the Gibeonites and David's oath regarding Mephibosheth.
- B. I don't think we are supposed to take this text and quickly make application to some area of our life. Rather than trying to fit this story into some moral dimension of our life, the narrator is purposely setting it before us in all of its gory and gruesome details. We are supposed to gaze upon this mother swallowed up in her grief. We are supposed to pause and enter into the pathos of the story.
- C. And perhaps it should cause us to look upon another death, equally gory and ghastly.
- I. The story draws our attention to a mother who has lost her sons
- A. This makes the scene particularly heart-wrenching
1. She gave birth to them, raised them. Saul is dead and she is a widow. Her sons are all she has.
 2. Suddenly an envoy comes from the king with orders to take her sons into custody. And just as suddenly they are delivered over to the Gibeonites and they are immediately executed.
 3. The mother is in grief and dismay. The one who gave birth to her sons and nursed them and protected them as children was now powerless to prevent this nightmare.
 4. To make matters worse, they were free from personal guilt. They were not being arrested because they had committed some crime. They were suffering condemnation due to the sins of another.
- B. The execution has been carried out, but the horror has not ended for this mother
1. There her two sons are, hanging exposed before the world. It was customary for victims of execution to be taken down at sunset. But not this time. The Gibeonites wanted the full restitution for the bloodguilt and they wanted it on display for all to see. But this dear mother could not endure having the bodies of her beloved sons dishonored and desecrated.
 2. She spreads the sackcloth of mourning on a rock and takes her post to guard the bodies. In this rugged region wild animals would quickly come to consume the flesh of her sons.
 3. The narrator wants us to take in the full measure of the scene. We are given few details, but our imaginations are easily able to fill in the gaps. As the corpses hung in the sun they quickly began to decay. The smell of decomposition filled the air while she was careful to rob the scavengers of their meal.

4. It is meant to be a ghastly scene. Death is never pretty. But the deaths of these seven young men is particularly stirring. They are stirring because of their apparent innocence. They were selected to represent the sins of a nation. Their executions were offered to appease the Gibeonites and to turn away the wrath of God.
 5. Their deaths were an act of atonement. David asked the Gibeonites:
2 Samuel 21:3 NAU - "What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"
The word is כָּפַר (*kaphar*) – it means to cover or make propitiation. It refers to the covering for sin, a turning away of wrath.
 6. It was actually a merciful request by the Gibeonites. When Saul sinned and broke covenant with the Gibeonites all of Israel became guilty. They should have all paid the price of atonement.
- C. Finally, the atonement is complete
1. David in his mercy has the corpses removed and given a proper burial
 2. They were placed in the tomb of their fathers and the text tells us that God had been appeased.
2 Samuel 21:14 NAU - "They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the grave of Kish his father; thus they did all that the king commanded, and after that God was moved by prayer for the land."

The narrator wants us to ponder these things carefully. We must not pass by them too quickly. We must not distract our hearts from the text by immediately trying to apply it to our own life's circumstances. There is a much higher consideration here, a much greater atonement. A Father gave His Son to be delivered. Ponder the gruesome scene.

- II. All of us suffer from the guilt of our covenant head
- A. Under the New Covenant there is individual responsibility
1. No longer is the saying true:
Ezekiel 18:2 NAU - "The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge"
 2. We will not be called to bear the penalty for the sins of our fathers. We cannot repent for their sin. We must repent of our own sin and condemnation.
- B. But there is an aspect of corporate solidarity that we all share
1. Our first father represented us in a covenant. He was our covenant head. He broke covenant. His sin became our sin. His guilt became our guilt. We suffer the misery of original sin, the defilement of a corrupt nature.
Romans 5:12 NAU - "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned"
 2. God's wrath is kindled upon all men, not just a three-year famine, but an everlasting condemnation. Sin is universal.
Romans 3:23 NAU - "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
It is a universal guilt, but it is also a personal guilt. We must suffer our own condemnation. We must bear the penalty of our guilt.

3. But God has provided for a substitute, someone to make atonement and satisfy God's justice.
John 3:16 NAU - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
1 Peter 3:18 NAU - "For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit"
- C. Jesus came forth according to God's redemptive purpose
1. He came to become Redeemer, to save His people from their sin through the shedding of His own blood.
 2. Jesus Christ suffered under the wrath of God – a perfect propitiation.
 3. To ponder the suffering of Christ is beyond our comprehension. To behold the perfect Lamb of God suffering in our stead demands the most solemn consideration.
 4. Jesus was taken into custody, but what was His crime. He was guiltless, holy and perfect – and yet, He was about to bear the sins of His people.
 5. He was beaten and scourged. His body was covered in blood, deep gouges in His back, and His face was so swollen you could hardly recognize Him.
 6. He was forced to carry His cross towards Calvary but He was so weakened from the brutality another was conscripted to carry His cross.
 7. And then He was nailed to the cross, exposed for all to see—one for the masses to mock and curse as they passed by.
- D. The Father watched as His Son became sin – the just for the unjust.
1. It was a scene beyond our ability to watch – but the Father watched. He poured His wrath out upon His own beloved Son. It was a pure love. It was a perfect love, an eternal love, a Divine love.
 But the Father loved His elect people and gave His Son.
Isaiah 53:10 KJV - "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief"
 2. And another mother watched her beloved Son die.
John 19:25-26 KJV - "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!"
 3. At the right time as Jesus was making atonement for the sins of His people the Father turned His face away. The sun ceased to shine and the world was thrown into darkness.
 4. The mother in our text tonight gazed at the gruesome image of her beloved sons as they hung to make atonement for the sins of their father. Jesus was crucified to make atonement for the sins of His people. His death was a gruesome display of the wretchedness of sin.

Conclusion:

1. We are supposed to gaze upon this scene. We are supposed to see the reality of the execution. We are supposed to ponder the love of a mother. We are supposed to be stirred as our imagination contemplates the gore of the scene.
2. This is the nature of atonement. It is bloody. It is gruesome. But it is necessary. Dale Ralph Davis – “The text says atonement *is* horrible, it *is* gory. Atonement is never nice but always gruesome. We need to see this for we easily fall into the trap of regarding atonement as merely a doctrine, a concept, an abstraction to be explained, a bit of theology to be analyzed. Or, little better, to view it as a moving story to be re-played during Passion Week. But we should know better. Surely the Israelite worshiper realized this when he towed a young bull to the tabernacle and had to slit its throat, skin it, cut it in pieces, and wash the insides and legs (Lev. 1:3–9). It was all mess and gore. From slicing the bull’s throat in Leviticus 1 all the way to Calvary God has always said atonement is nasty and repulsive. Christians must beware of becoming too refined, longing for a kinder, gentler faith. If we’ve grown too used to Golgotha perhaps Gibeah (v. 6) can shock us back into truth: atonement is a drippy, bloody, smelly business. The stench of death hangs heavy wherever the wrath of God has been quenched.¹
3. Let our hearts be filled with awe and great thanksgiving at the One God sent as our atoning sacrifice.

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary, (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 269.