

Wise Woman of Abel

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2022-02-27

2 Samuel 20:14-22

Introduction - this woman models six steps of peacemaking

If there is one thing that characterizes the nameless woman in our story, it is peacemaking. She was a peacemaker in an incredibly tense situation. And I think there is a lot we can learn about peacemaking from her. The text obviously treats her as model for others since the passage twice calls her “wise” in her peacemaking. Wisdom is to be imitated. So by inspiration we know that she is a model. She also shows initiative, courage, tact, diplomacy, and decisiveness. And those can all be marvelous tools in a woman’s tool bag. Another thing to be noted about her is that she does not have the same tunnel vision that we men sometimes do. We men tend to be so goal oriented that it is very easy for us to miss alternative solutions. With strengths come weaknesses; we need each other.

What was the obvious alternative solution? Well, Deuteronomy 20 commanded Israel’s armies to offer peace and to dialogue with a city before they went to war against it. But Joab had been so focused on his goal of squashing the rebellion, that he did not do so. She very tactfully reminds him of this fact. For Joab, this city was an obstacle to his goal, so squashing the city like a bug seemed like the logical thing to do. And the men defending the city have tunnel vision too. They see Joab as a dangerous enemy determined to annihilate them, so they hunker down into a win-lose option as well, hoping (obviously) to be on the winning side. But this amazing woman rejects the idea that there are only two options – win or lose. She was looking outside the box for another solution. She knew that options would be closed off at the end of a war, so she took the initiative to seek an alternative solution while there was still some room for negotiation. I love this woman’s example. So I am presenting her to you this morning not only as a model woman (she is a model woman on many levels), but also as a model peacemaker. Let’s go through the passage phrase by phrase.

Try to make contact (v. 16)

The first thing we see is that you can’t have peacemaking unless you make verbal contact. Of course, that verbal contact needs to be the right kind of contact or it can mess things up. But let’s break things apart.

Take wise initiative (v. 16a)

Verse 16 begins, “Then a wise woman cried out from the city.” She obviously thinks it is nuts to just wait for the inevitable. She takes the initiative. Nobody else is acting to avert disaster, so she decides that she needs to at least *say* something. Maybe nothing will come of it, but she needs to at least say something.

Now I will grant you that there are people who take initiative who actually make matters worse, so this point by itself does not guarantee peace making. In fact, it can be peace breaking. So the word “wise” is an essential adjective in the outline. It was *wise* initiative. And let me define initiative. Initiative is 1) doing the right thing, 2) without having to be told, 3) in a proactive manner, 4) and despite discouraging prospects. Have you taught your children to take initiative? It’s an incredibly important tool for success. Let me repeat that definition. Initiative is 1) doing the right thing, 2) without having to be told, 3) in a proactive manner, 4) and despite discouraging prospects. It’s the opposite of being passive and waiting for something good to happen or waiting to be told what to do.

And all through this sermon I am going to be giving side applications. And I’m going to do that right now: Don’t ever think that a submissive woman must be a passive woman. The Proverbs 31 woman was anything but passive. I like what Mary Kay Ash said on this subject. She said, “There are three types of people in this world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened.” And here was a woman who made things happen *without ceasing to be a wise woman*.

And sometimes women second-guess themselves as to whether they have authority to take initiative. I’m going to embarrass my wife by using her in yet another illustration - this time as an illustration of initiative. My wife knows my desires, passions, and vision for the future, the oversight I have given on the budget, and my philosophy of the family, and because of that, she can make snap decisions without having to consult me in an emergency. She anticipates what I want, and takes initiative, even if I haven’t necessarily thought of it myself. Some of you have recently read the book, Traction. Joel recently introduced me to it, and I discovered that Jarrod introduced it to his company five years ago. It’s an amazing book for business. Kathy and I have both recently read it. You might want to apply some of those principles for how you lead your family. Obviously you can’t hire and fire members from your family, but there are principles that can apply.

One of the key things in the Traction book is having the right people in the right seat and not micromanaging them. This results immediately in an increased output from combined effort. And we call this synergy. We’ve talked about synergy many times, so I’m not going to dwell on it. Let me use an illustration that I don’t think I have used before. A single thread may be able to hold up one pound. You would expect, that three threads that are wound together would hold up three pounds, but in reality those three threads put together can hold up 8 or 9 pounds. Six threads multiply that effect. And I have shared with you before the synergy of a team of horses.

The ideal marriage is a marriage that has synergy – where the man and the woman can get much more accomplished together than they would have accomplished when not married. And why do they accomplish more? Because of the economic principles of synergy, division of labor, specialization, and initiative. And I have talked enough in the past about us men not being micromanagers.

But let’s examine how this woman had godly initiative that didn’t undermine her leadership. The proof can be seen by the fact that the leaders were unanimous in agreeing with her idea in verse 22. She had anticipated the desires of the leadership rather well,

even though they themselves had not thought of this idea. That's the kind of woman you want side by side with you. You don't have to micromanage her. You know that her initiative is always going to be engaged in your best interests. And that was true even though this was a very stressful situation. I love this woman. She is just like my wife (well, other than throwing heads over walls - but she is just like my wife) who anticipates my desires and takes initiative without having to be told to do so. And yet she is in total submission to me. And in conflict resolution, people of initiative are indispensable because they can take the needed action at just the opportune time. In real life you don't have a perfect schedule. There are constant interruptions and God brings divine opportunities you hadn't anticipated.

Be courageous/bold (v. 16)

And that brings up the second subpoint under "Trying to make contact." Sometimes this takes courage and boldness. With arrows flying through the air, it was probably dangerous for any one of the soldiers to stick his head up over the wall. And yet, somehow this woman found a person who was somewhat isolated from the rest of the army. I think she is on a different part of the wall than where the battering of the walls is happening. We aren't told how it happened, but she finally saw a person close enough to yell at, yet far enough away from the center of battle that she could stick her head above the wall and yell at him and try to get his attention. When that rare opportunity presented itself, she wouldn't have had time to go the leaders of the city and ask them if she could talk to that person. The opportunity would have been lost. She knows that she needs to snatch the opportunity while it was still there and she yells out. So there is initiative, but there is also boldness in doing this. There was some risk in her doing this.

Sometimes being a peacemaker can make you a bit nervous. I shared with you once before that at Trinity Pres I had to engage in an intervention on behalf of a woman who was being abused by her husband. I was calm, but forceful in telling this man that what he was doing was illegal, but more importantly was against God's moral law and he needed to quit it. He flew into a rage and tried to punch me in the head. I told him, "You can beat me up, but it is my responsibility before God to confront you." Initially he got even angrier, and I really wondered if I was going to be beaten to a pulp. But after talking him down, the guy calmed down, repented, and we were able to make progress on peacemaking - and especially dealing with his anger, which he had never learned to control. The point is, it sometimes takes boldness and courage to be a peacemaker. It takes boldness to stick your head up over the wall when the arrows are flying. And if we are too timid, we are less likely to be good peacemakers.

If need be, involve others (v. 16b)

The third subpoint under "trying to make contact" is there are times when you cannot do it yourself and you need to involve someone else. This woman could not get Joab's attention, so she yells at this soldier, "Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, 'Come nearby, that I may speak with you.'" Now, in some circumstances this could have been meddling. If the leaders were already trying to parley with Joab with a white flag of negotiation, it would have been

presumptuous for her to do her own negotiations independently. In fact, it could have been an act of rebellion. But what she was doing was trying to act in a way that would not undermine the leadership, and yet recognizing that the leadership either did not have the opportunity to act or were failing to act for another reason. So she tries to conscript help. She yells for a person to bring Joab over. Why the soldier even bothered to listen to her, we aren't told. But he must have been intrigued by her demeanor, and he called Joab.

Try to gain a hearing (v. 17)

The woman then tried to gain a hearing with Joab. And it is so important that we try to gain a hearing when hostilities have made people unwilling to listen to each other. It takes effort and EQ, and verbal wisdom to gain a hearing. Verse 17.

2Sam. 20:17 When he had come near to her, the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Hear the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening."

So in that verse she accomplished the general goal of point number I – try to gain a hearing. They may not *want* to listen to you, but try to gain a hearing anyway. It may take courage. It may take initiative.

But do so with humility (v. 17)

But I want you to notice that she gained this hearing with humility, not with arrogance. She said, "Hear the words of your maidservant." That is a very humble and self-effacing statement. Humility deescalates tensions. You are much more likely to gain a hearing from a hostile person if you approach him with humility than if you approach him angrily and arrogantly. I am your maidservant. I am here to serve your best interests. So that is Roman numeral I – try to gain a hearing.

Speak with confidence (vv. 18-21)

She speaks with authority as one who is in the right

But the fact that she was humble did not mean she was servile or that she lacked confidence. And that is Roman numeral II. I think it was her very confidence that gained her a hearing. We will look at verses 18-21 in more detail in a little bit, but I want you to notice three things about her speech that make Joab take her seriously.

First of all, she speaks with authority. She obviously had no personal or positional authority over *him*, but there were three things that gave her whole demeanor an authority that came from God. And the first thing that gave her a sense of authority is that she knows what she is talking about and she knows that she is right. Let's just read through verses 18-21 in one fell swoop, and then I will comment on it.

2Sam. 20:18 So she spoke, saying, "They used to talk in former times, saying, 'They shall surely seek guidance at Abel,' and so they would end *disputes*."

2Sam. 20:19 *I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"*

2Sam. 20:20 And Joab answered and said, "Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy!

2Sam. 20:21 That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city." So the woman said to Joab, "Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall."

How could she be so confident? How could she speak with such authority? Well, think about it. If the leaders are presented with an alternative: kill the rebel Sheba or have the city and all its men destroyed, do you think they are going argue? I don't think so. This was not an ill-founded confidence. She knew what her leaders would want. And it was *being in tune with what they would want* that enabled her to speak with such authority.

Let me use an illustration of the difference between confident initiative that is not under authority versus confident initiative that is under authority. At our previous church there was a woman who was married to a military man who would be gone for months at a time. (And she has said that she doesn't mind me telling you this story. I've told it once before.) Anyway, the woman asked my wife for counsel on how to deal with conflict in their marriage. She said that the first month that her husband was back was horrible because they would have constant conflict. Well, as my wife dug a bit into what was happening it became quickly evident that when the husband was gone, the wife would see herself as in charge and when he came back she would have to transition to seeing him as in charge. When he was gone she would do things her way and when the husband came back, she would have to switch to doing things his way, and there was a period of conflict and adjustment. And it wasn't like either of those ways of doing things was bad – it was just *two different ways*.

Anyway, Kathy told the woman that when I (her husband) am gone I am still in charge and she tries to anticipate exactly what I would want. And she taught our kids to do the same thing with *their* bosses – anticipate their desires even before they tell you. Anyway, because Kathy always acted as if I was in charge whether I was present or not, her behavior never had to change whether I am present or gone. There might be some things she might have to ask my guidance on, but for the most part she knew what my leadership would want and there was no period of adjustment when I came back. And she told the woman to make it her goal in life to be a helpmeet and to try to understand and anticipate her husband's philosophy and desires. Well, she did. And just that little adjustment completely solved their problems. That woman no longer lived independently when the husband was gone, and the transition after deployment was finished was as smooth as could be. Though she continued to make decisions with confidence and skill, it was not an independent confidence or initiative. And I believe this woman's confidence was not an independent confidence, but a confidence in knowing exactly what the city leaders would want. It was a confidence that she was doing the right thing. And who knows, she may have even been the wife of one of those city leaders, though we don't know that.

She speaks with confidence as one who is in line with God's law (cf Deut. 20:10-14 and the implication of v. 18)

The second thing that gave her confidence was that she knew that Joab had violated God's law and what she was asking for was something that Deuteronomy 20 mandated anyway – to talk to the city before you war against the city. Commentators point out that this is one of two things implied in her phrase, "They used to talk in former times, saying, 'They shall surely seek guidance at Abel,' and so they would end disputes." Obviously it is giving a historical fact about Abel being a place that people would go to for wisdom (and some people think for prophetic wisdom, since Deborah too was called a mother in Israel – but that is debated). But commentators point out that this was also a polite way of asking, "Why did you declare war without ever talking to the leaders of this city – without ever asking for their counsel? That's what people *used* to do." Deuteronomy 20 mandated talking to the leaders of even a *pagan* city before declaring war upon it – how much more so upon an Israelite city? And how much more so in a city that specialized in the past in peacemaking. Some commentators believe that it is almost certain that Deuteronomy 20 was in the background of her thinking.

So knowing God's Scriptures gave her authority. There have been times when I have had to confront a person about sexual immorality or something else and especially at my previous church I had a couple people tell me, "The Bible says, 'Judge not that you be not judged.'" And my response? "Oh, I'm not judging you; God is. I'm just telling you what God thinks. I'm a sinner just like you are, but both of us need to listen to God when He clearly speaks in the Scripture." Even if you have no authority over a person, 1 Peter 4:11 calls us to speak with the authority of being an oracle of God or a mouthpiece of God. How does a wife do that with her husband? She meekly shares a Scripture. "Don't you think that it would be better to do things this way?" She has all the authority of God backing her up on that Scripture. You are speaking on God's behalf when you speak Scripture.

Peacemaking is not just telling people to quit fighting and to be nice. That's humanism. *Biblical* peacemaking is approaching the conflict from the objective status of knowing the truth and standing on the side of truth. Too much peacemaking out there ignores the truth and sweeps sin under the carpet because it values peace more than truth. That's not true peacemaking. Ken Sande calls it Peace Faking. So she had confidence because she knew she was right. Second, she had confidence because she had the authority of Deuteronomy 20 behind her.

She speaks with confidence in standing for something that is in Israel's best interest (v. 19)

In effect Christian nation should not fight Christian nation

The third thing that gave her confidence was that she was seeking something that was actually in Joab's best interest and in Israel's best interest. Verse 19:

2Sam. 20:19 *I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"*

This implies three things. First, it implies that a Christian nation should not be fighting a Christian city. It is definitely not in the country's best interests.

“a mother to Israel” – It was a city that served Israel’s interests and had nurtured Israel.

Secondly, by calling the city of Abel “a mother to Israel,” she was probably making a reference to the protective status that this city had served Israel with down through history. Now, it may have some other implications of being a prophetic center as well, though I’m not quite so certain of that. But since it was near the northern border, it had born the brunt of invasions and had served Israel well. It was certainly not in Israel’s best interest to be destroying Abel – one of the key defensive cities for David. There is debate on the exact meaning of the term, but there is no mistaking the implication that you shouldn’t be attacking your mother. You need your mother. It’s not in your best interests to attack your mother.

“swallow up the Lord’s inheritance” – Joab is taking something that does not belong to him

And then the third reason she had confidence in speaking to Joab was that God had given the tribe of Dan this city as an inheritance, and it was not for the taking of any other tribe. Why are you eating or swallowing up something that doesn’t belong to you? If the Lord has given this city as an inheritance to us, you are obviously out of the Lord’s will to independently take it from us. She obviously wasn’t aware of the situation of Sheba being a rebel against David. Sheba may have told the city a totally different story - probably had. But in any case, this represents her initial shock that Israel would attack and try to take away a part of the inheritance of the tribe of Dan. But the point I am making is that she was able to speak out of confidence because she felt that what she was doing was in the right.

A peacemaker cannot go into a peacemaking situation without having confidence in the rightness of doing so. Some of the peacemakers that America sends out to other countries are in a bind because they are really not defending a policy that is defensible. It’s really hard to convince people to be at peace when you are not in the right. If Abel had started this war, she would have made no progress with Joab. If she was timid, nothing may have happened. If she was only concerned about her own skin, nothing may have happened. But her confidence in God’s Word and that a resolution could be achieved won the day.

Try to focus on a basis for trust (vv. 18-19a)

History of wisdom (v. 18a)

The third major thing that her speech accomplishes is that it is trying to build a basis for trust. Why should Joab trust her, and why should he trust the city? Well, verses 18-19 show

three additional things that formed a basis for trust. She told Joab of Abel's history of wisdom.

“They used to talk in former times, saying, ‘They shall surely seek *guidance* at Abel,’ and so they would end *disputes*.”

The city had been trusted for a long time to be a place where you could find wise counsel; and specifically, wise counsel for disputes. We are in a dispute here, so why don't we parley? There is plenty of reason to trust negotiations just based on our history of conflict resolution. So that's the first basis for trust – *a good track record*.

I've known people who want to be involved in counseling and conflict resolution, yet they not only have no track record of their own success for peacemaking, they have a track record for *creating* constant conflict. Years ago I had a pastor approach me and give me a flier that he wanted me to distribute to the whole congregation. It was advertising his marriage counseling services. And I almost laughed out loud because right on the brochure he gave as one of his chief qualifications (you know, of being empathetic) that he had been divorced three times. And as I asked further questions, I discovered that he had been kicked out of his liberal church pastorate because of his sexual shenanigans with the secretary. Great track record for counseling! No, there would be no trust for marital counseling there. But the city of Abel has a track record that you can trust.

History of conflict resolution (v. 18b)

So (to review) first of all, Abel had a track record of wisdom. It wasn't just a youngster wanting to counsel. Secondly, it had a track record of actually settling disputes very successfully. She said, “and so they would end disputes.” In other words, they were very successful. So she is telling Joab that there were resources in the city for a wise resolution of any conflict, including this one.

A commitment to faithfulness and peace (v. 19a)

Thirdly, she herself was a woman committed to being faithful to the Lord and pursuing peace. She said, “I *am among the peaceable and faithful* in Israel.” And since she was *among the peaceable and faithful* in Israel, she implies that there were others in the city who could be trusted to pursue peace rather than to simply try to win a war. In effect she was encouraging Joab not to engage in the fallacy of guilt by association. It appears that she didn't even know why Joab was fighting the city, but if there was a good reason, don't assume that everyone in the city has the same issue or the same problem. It really is a veiled rebuke to Joab. But she frames it in a way that forms a basis for trust. Even though it is a speech with Hebrew metaphors that are obscure to us thousands of years later, it really is a cool little speech once you understand the metaphors.

Try to appeal to common interests

But there is a fourth dynamic that I see for peacemaking in this passage: it is that she was trying to appeal to the common interests that they both had. She didn't just focus on who

was right and who was wrong. She tried to find out what was driving Joab so that she could figure out a way of meeting his goals and still meeting the city's goals. Finding common ground is one of the key principles in Ken Sande's book, *The Peacemaker*. How can we both have our central aims achieved rather than making this a win-lose situation? Now, some situations can't be anything other than win-lose or even lose-lose. But this point is trying to figure out how can we turn it into a win-win situation.

Even Joab wasn't interested in destruction for destruction's sake (v. 19b)

She says,

You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"

Whatever she meant by that, it must have struck a chord with Joab because he immediately responds:

... "Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy!

He is somewhat taken aback by what she had to say. Even Joab had no interest in destruction for destruction's sake. He must have realized that he was partly in the wrong on this. But he also feels that *she has misunderstood*, so he defends himself. His goal was to do away with rebellion and to seek the peace of the nation. So she was able to appeal to a common desire between both parties. And in the past I have shared a number of stories that how show this can be achieved - my most frequently cited one being the 1994 General Assembly of the PCA where we sought a resolution that wasn't perfect, but it met the chief goals of both sides. But you have to do that without compromising Biblical principle. And I won't repeat those stories.

Joab had a vested interest in the future survival of this city (v. 19c)

Second, she is saying that Joab had a vested interest in the future survival of this city. That's a very important thought. If it really is a mother in Israel, Israel will be hurt if the mother is hurt. Now these kinds of negotiations don't always work out. Pride, anger, and so many other things can get in the way of genuine resolution.

R. L. Dabney gave an account of a delegation from the South begging president Abraham Lincoln to consider a compromise and to not go to war.¹ Colonel Baldwin (representing the South) assured Lincoln that he would not have to compromise his views on Union, and sought to convince Lincoln that they had the votes to eventually make reunion possible if he would only concede the unconstitutional point that was at issue. Colonel Baldwin said,

Only give this assurance to the country, in a proclamation of five lines, and we pledge ourselves that Virginia (and with her the border States) will stand by you as though you were our own Washington. So

¹ R. L. Dabney, *Discussions, volume IV* (Vallecito: Ross House Books, 1979), pp. 87-100.

sure am I of this, and of the inevitable ruin which will be precipitated by the opposite policy, that I would this day freely consent, if you would let me write those decisive lines, you might cut off my head, were my life my own, the hour after you signed them.”

He was offering his life in place of the country going to war, and guaranteeing that union could be achieved without war if he would only get rid of the unconstitutional issue that was so harming the South. So Colonel Baldwin was engaging in exactly this kind of negotiation by showing what was at stake for both sides (horrible, horrible losses) and what would be beneficial to both sides. Unfortunately, Lincoln adamantly refused any compromise, flippantly saying, “What then, would become of my tariff?” So there are no guarantees that peacemaking will work, but appealing to common interests can sometimes be an effective strategy.

Joab comes into agreement with her on these issues (v. 20)

And in the case of Joab, we’ve already seen that it worked. In verse 20 Joab says that he had no interest in destroying Abel or swallowing up their inheritance as if it belonged to him. That was not his intent at all.

Narrow down the real problem (v. 21)

The real troublemaker was Sheba

Then in verse 21 we see a narrowing down of the discussions to what the real problem was. And you will never have peacemaking if you don’t have this point. Too many times the peripheral issues cloud the discussions. Joab was treating Abel’s closed gates as being the real problem. Abel was treating Joab’s hostile intentions as being the real problem. But it suddenly dawns on Joab that she and the city probably don’t have a clue about the real character of Sheba, and he tells her what the real problem is. It’s too bad that he hadn’t done this earlier. He says,

2Sam. 20:21 That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.”...

Let’s assume that the city had 20,000 people in it. By fighting against the city, Joab had been generalizing the problem as being 20,000 strong. When discussion ensued, it got narrowed down from 20,000 to only one problem – Sheba. *And since they both had narrowed things down to agree to the same problem, they could come to resolution.* In the story I told you about Colonel Baldwin and Abraham Lincoln, they couldn’t narrow things down to one problem. Lincoln and the Southern Delegation saw two totally different problems and it was impossible to come to an agreement. For the South it was the survival of the Constitution that was at stake. For Lincoln, it was money and maintaining the union. One eyewitness quoted Lincoln as saying, “If I do that, what will become of my revenue? I might as well shut up housekeeping at once!” In my view, Lincoln’s unconstitutional philosophy was the Sheba, but that is the subject for another discussion - which I’m sure David Dirksen would be glad to have with you.

She was willing to deal with the real troublemaker

Though the North was not willing to deal with the unconstitutional philosophy of Lincoln, this woman was certain that her city *would* deal with the real problem. The second half of verse 21:

So the woman said to Joab, “Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall.”

Because of her willingness to deal with the real problem, she managed to negotiate a deal with Joab. In the process she saved countless lives. But this has application to our lives as well. If the only solution you can think of to resolve a conflict between two people is to ask them to stop it and to be nice, you are unlikely to be successful. Many parents don't deal with the real issues at stake in the conflicts between their children. They try to separate them and try to get them to be nice. But there is likely a sin that needs to be beheaded in one or both of the children before peace can ensue. Without narrowing down the problem we are covering the problem with a Band-Aid.

I have read Christian books on peacemaking that miss this principle completely. All they are focused on is point number IV. And as a result they are useless books. One book on conflict resolution was absolutely confident that they could resolve differences between proliferators and abortion advocates by highlighting things that they have in common. They could work together for a common good. I'm sorry. That won't work. If the godly Biblical essentials are not shared by both sides, then peacemaking will not work. And that is the huge mistake many people make in our culture. Christians want us to be so nice that they end up harboring the enemy of God and the enemy of His Word. For example, they stay in a liberal denomination that has denied the Gospel, denied the inerrancy of Scripture, has promoted homosexuality and abortion, and they have stayed because they are focusing on some things that they have in common and yet are utterly ignoring the dangerous Shebas who need to be metaphorically beheaded. And in the process the whole church keeps getting more and more corrupt. The Shebas guarantee that they will get more corrupt. And by the way, a lot of times it is the women who keep the families in those liberal churches. They are so focused on relationships that they are willing to put up with the Shebas. They are not acting as true peacemakers. They are peace fakers.

And the applications of this can go to other areas of life. As long as politicians in Washington DC are treasonous Constitution-breakers who perjure themselves by violating their oath to the constitution, no Constitutionalist should even bother looking for common ground over which they can compromise on bills. You cannot overlook the essentials. Maybe I am naive, but I think that is ridiculous. There are some things that you must fight a win-lose battle over. Some people mock Dr. Ron Paul for being Dr No and not accomplishing anything. I take that as a badge of honor for him. There are some things so bad that if you don't fight for them, you are being faithless. In the last century, J. Gresham Machen worded it well in his fight against liberalism. He said,

In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight.

And there are too many people who want us to leave the Shebas alone. We saw that at our State capitol this past week - Christians who aren't willing to abolish abortion through State and county nullification. That's a doable thing. But they are trying to regulate abortion. And we see this all across the States. You see State after State where Christians are trying to gain common ground with unbelievers over a heartbeat or over pulling people's hearts strings on the gruesomeness of late term abortion. And so what do they come up with? Anaesthesia for the baby! Give me a break. That was so disheartening to see that debate last year. But Joab knew that if he left Sheba alone, the whole kingdom was in jeopardy. There can be no peace treaty between proliferers and abortionists because abortion is a Sheba that must be stopped, abolished, ended - period. That's why Jarrod started End Abortion Now in Nebraska. That must be a battle that continues until abortion is criminalized. Nothing less honors God's law. And nothing less really takes God's grace seriously. If the first four points are being followed without the godly goal of point V, you actually end up sweeping the problems under the carpet and perpetuating them.

So yes, we should try to make contact with those that we are war with (point I - I'm not saying we can't dialogue with unbelievers; we should). And we should speak with the confidence that comes from knowing the Bible and standing for truth (point II), it is always helpful if the other side knows that we are trustworthy - that we will keep our word (point III), and it is useful to appeal to common interests as we present our goals (point IV). I'm not opposed to *that* kind of incrementalism. But let's make sure that we really are dealing with the problems that *God* sees as the most important problems and *not see the conflict itself as being the only problem*. After all, Christ promised to bring the sword and conflict. We just need to make sure we are engaged in the right conflicts and the right peacemaking. Some people are so conflict averse that they will never deal with Sheba. But this unnamed lady was a true peacemaker because she was quite willing to fight against Sheba, once she understood that Sheba was the problem. And this was a place where Joab was right, and she *did* need to be instructed on that.

Go through the same process with the other side and get both sides to deal definitively with the real issues (v. 22)

And in verse 22 she went through the same process of convincing the leaders of Abel to deal with the same issues. Verse 22 says,

2Sam. 20:22 Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw *it* out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.

This verse shows the power that wisdom and peacemaking can have to change cities. You don't have to have bazookas and tanks to win a culture. You only have to have the truth and to use it under the power of God's Spirit and with His blessing. And if you are skeptical about whether that is possible, you don't know history. You need to read about how country after country was won to Christ against impossible odds in the 300's and following: Armenia, England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Spain, etc. They were won by the Word of God being preached and lived out by tiny Christian minorities. Most culture wars down

through history have been won by minorities unwilling to compromise. Let me repeat that: most culture wars down through history have been won by minorities unwilling to compromise - whether those minorities were believers or unbelievers. In the last century it was small relentless God-hating minorities that brought communism to country after country - with devastating death and carnage. In the early 1900s it was relentless minority of feminists that turned families, churches, and nation away from its godly roots. In recent years it has been relentless minorities that have taught in schools, influenced politicians, and brought critical race theory and other aspects of destructive critical theories into every nook and cranny of life. Minorities have taken over because Christians don't know where to draw the line in the sand - we compromise ourselves to death. Dabney passionately argued that government schools needed to be killed in their infancy or they would produce horrible results in our nation. When you read his essay from the 1800s you will realize that he was describing exactly the outcomes that we see today. It was almost prophetic. It is the inevitable result of government education. Yet Christians found it easy to take free money - the cheese in the rat trap. By the way, even though Herbster does not like government schools or the taxes that fund government schools and wants to put pressure on them by letting every dollar of tax funding for education to follow students to private schools, you know what the enemy will immediately do - they will control all the private schools that take that money. We need to cut things off at the root. All of the DC agencies are unconstitutional. Until we cut back government programs and ungodly ventures, we will not have success. We need to deal with the real problem and be relentless about it. Though its not a Christian organization, I love a lot of the bills and plans of Downsize DC. They have a lot of the principles that this woman of Abel had. They are going for the gusto. We need to learn from them.

Conclusion

So this passage gives us a glimmer of hope in the midst of horrible political circumstances. Think of how hopeless their circumstances were. On the one side, an entire city was facing death. On the other side, David was being held captive to a certain degree by the political machinery. It could have been discouraging times to live in. Yet here was a woman who had the faith to instantly take advantage of a providential opportunity, and as a result of doing so, she brought a peace that seemed impossible just hours before. Peacemaking can sometimes happen from people and places far removed from the centers of power. God can use the most unlikely of candidates. Previously we looked at a little slave girl in Syria speaking with confidence about God's ability to heal her mistress' husband, the powerful Naaman. And think of the national peace that came from that little maid's testimony.

And the application really goes way beyond peacemaking. Do we have the courage to take advantage of the providential opportunities God brings into our paths? Or do you shut your mouth out of nervousness? God could use you to turn our city upside down - with a simple speech to the mayor or the city council, or a divine contact at the St. Saint Patrick's Day parade.

And if you want a book of stories from the past 2000 years of unknown men, women, and even children who had a profound impact upon their local cities, read George Grant's very-

easy-to-read and very interesting book, *Third Time Around*. I recommended that at the deacons training class this past week. It will make you realize that even Omaha is no match for a *robust* Christianity. The subtitle of his book is, *A History of the Pro-Life Movement From the First Century to the Present*. That is an incredibly encouraging book. It looks at times and circumstances that were far more evil and depressing than anything we are facing, yet people like this lady took advantage of the providential opportunities that God was giving, and though weak, were used by God to turn cultures upside down. I'm not kidding; that is not an exaggeration. God used ordinary people to turn cultures upside down.

You can read about the impact that a runaway girl, Dympna, made in the Flemish lowlands. She was weak, yet God used her in an absolutely remarkable way. She had to flee from the incestuous advances of her father, but God used her to establish orphanages, to care for the poor, to oppose abortion. During a fearful time when others were trying to withdraw and to protect themselves from the Barbarian hordes that were still threatening the frontiers, and from the Norse raiders who were attacking the coastline, and from the feudal rivalries that were paralyzing the interior, she saw it all as *opportunity* - opportunity to showcase God's way versus man's failing ways. When humanism is falling apart, what a great opportunity there is to present the answers of Scripture. She didn't get discouraged. She saw these things as opportunities to advance the healing Shalom of God in her country. And God gave her enormous success in changing that land. I don't think she was trying to be a success. Not at all. She was just looking to be faithful to God in the face of opportunity. But it is recognizing opportunity (and not running from it) that is half the battle. Don't run from the St. Patrick's Day parade just because you are nervous. In a bit we will close our service by singing, *May the Mind of Christ My Savior Live in Me From Day to Day*. Let's close in prayer.