October 8/9, 2016

My Redeemer Lives

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 4:1-12

Pastor Bryan Clark

So, do you think the end justifies the means? In other words, anything goes if, at the end of the day it advantages you or it advances your cause? Now I think most people in our culture would say, principally speaking, they don't agree with that. That's in principle. But I would say in practice, it's a whole different story. Because we've become so selfish and self-centered as a culture, I think most people will figure out a way to reason, rationalize, spin, excuse, sweep under the carpet—whatever is necessary—if it somehow advantages me or advances my cause.

In the language of the proverbs, that person would be described as *wicked*—someone who in order to advantage himself or herself, is also then willing to disadvantage others. But clearly as Christians, we've been called to something different, and something more. We've been called, no matter what the circumstances, to do the right thing before God. But that can be very difficult; it can be very challenging. So how do we do that? I would suggest to you there's something you need to know and believe with all your heart if you are actually going to live that way. That's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 4. If you are visiting with us, last year we went through 1 Samuel; this year we're going through 2 Samuel. We are through chapter three.

At this point in the story, David is king over one tribe—Judah in the South. Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, is king over kind of a conglomerate in the North. Much of the North is possessed by the Philistines. They've been engaged in seven years of civil war; the nation is kind of hanging by a thread. In chapter three David encounters multiple difficult, complex situations that had the potential to devastate the nation—choices that affected the lives of thousands of men, women and children. Yet with great skill, with great thoughtfulness, David maneuvered his way through each of these circumstances in such a way that it is entirely possible that the North and the South could come together, unified under David as their new king—really quite a remarkable feat of leadership that I believe is meant to demonstrate that David is ready to be king. So that's where we pick it up in chapter four, verse one.

> **Now when Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel was disturbed. Saul's son *had* two men who were commanders of bands: the name of the one was Baanah and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the sons of Benjamin (for Beeroth is also considered *part* of Benjamin, and the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been aliens there until this day).** (*NASB, 2 Samuel 4:1-3)

So a couple of key details to set up this morning's story: Ish-bosheth hears that Abner is dead. If you were with us last week, Abner was killed by Joab. Abner was the leader in the North. He was the power; he was the warrior in the North, running kind of a puppet regime through Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul. But now Abner is dead, and what it says of Ish-bosheth is basically he has no will to fight. He has been portrayed in 2 Samuel as, by and large, rather cowardly and weak, and basically what the text says is he does not want this fight with David. He's basically ready to roll over. We also learned that all of Israel—and that would be the North then—is deeply shaken. It's the idea that they knew that the power was Abner; it wasn't Ish-bosheth, and now Abner is dead and they are in great danger. The Philistines are on their border; Joab and his

army from the South could easily wipe them out, and they are hanging by a thread and really deeply shaken.

We are also told that there are two commanders from Ish-bosheth's army. Both of them commanded raiding parties which would have been small military groups that went into neighboring areas and raided the enemies and brought back the spoils. One was Rechab; the other was Baanah, brothers from the same father who then is rooted to the tribe of Benjamin. The significance about the description of where they come from, basically takes us back to the book of Joshua where we find out the Beerothites were basically grandfathered into the tribe of Benjamin. So these are not two brothers from the enemies from without, but they are rather from the very family or tribe of Saul and Ish-bosheth. Verse 4:

> **Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.**

So this is in a Hebrew narrative, what we refer to as a structural element. The key to interpreting a Hebrew narrative is to learn: *what am I supposed to be looking for*? One of those things you look for are structural elements, and this is a particular structural element known as a flashback. Basically the idea is this: If you look at the plot of the story, this doesn't advance the plot of the story at all. As a matter of fact, if you pull it out, the story just flows without it. So when you read it, it feels like this is unnecessarily inserted into the middle of the story. So typically when we're reading a text like this, we tend to ignore that, because it doesn't really fit, which is a huge mistake. Rather than ignore it, it's important to understand we should underline it; we should highlight it; we should circle it because for the interpreter, a structural element like a flashback is only there for one reason, and that is because there's something you need to know to understand the point of the text. For those of us that seek to interpret the text, it's a gift that helps us open up the text. In this case it flashes back and tells us that, by the way, Jonathan had a son by the name of Mephibosheth. When Saul and Jonathan died in battle, Mephibosheth's nurse picked him up and they were all fleeing, and he had some sort of an accident—probably broke both legs. What we're told is: from that moment on, for life he was crippled in both legs. That would have been when he was five, so at this point in the story he would be twelve.

In the ancient world, a king did not sit in his office and administrate. A king was a warrior; a king was the commander of the troops. A king went out with the army and fought the battle. Therefore, you could not be crippled in both legs and be king. So what the text has told us is that Saul has a son Ish-bosheth who is king in the North, but he has lost his will to fight. He is willing to roll over. The only other blood relative that could possibly stand in the way of David being king is Mephibosheth, but Mephibosheth doesn't stand in the way because he's crippled and he can't be king. So the point is: the way to the throne for David is now clear. It is possible that in the midst of all the blood and the civil war, they have reached a point that without more bloodshed, it is possible for the North and the South to come together as a united nation under David as the new king—really quite remarkable...except there are two commanders under Ish-bosheth that want to advantage themselves. Verse 5:

> **So the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, departed and came to the house of Ish-bosheth in the heat of the day while he was taking his midday rest. They came to the middle of the house as if to get wheat, and they struck him in the belly; and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. Now when they came into the house, and he was lying on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and killed him and beheaded him. And they took his head and traveled by way of the**

Arabah all night. Then they brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Behold, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; thus the LORD has given my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and his descendants. (Vs. 5-8)

So these two commanders, who were brothers, go to the house of Ish-bosheth. In the ancient Near East it was very common that in the heat of the day you rested. You tended to work early and late. So they would have known that Ish-bosheth would be taking his midday nap. Now as commanders they would have had easy access on to the premises. As a matter of fact, it would have been common. They go to get the grain in order to feed their raiding band, so even that would have been very common. So they have easy access to Ish-bosheth and the text tells us they go to where he's sleeping; they stab him in the belly; they kill him and they leave. But there's a second structural element to this text that's very interesting. If you notice, the death scene is repeated. If you turned this in on an English paper, the English teacher would put red for redundant, and circle it because it basically repeats the whole death scene, but adds a few details.

In a Hebrew narrative, the purpose that serves is to cause the reader to slow down. It's like instant replay—goes back into the scene to see the senseless, bloody, cowardly deed that was done. So the text adds a few details in the replay: They go into the house; he is lying on his bed in the bedroom, and then three quick verbs: They **struck him**...they **killed him**...they **beheaded him**. They take the head and they take off for Hebron. They travel all night; that's a distance of about thirty miles, so they were definitely getting right at it. They show up to David. In their minds they are imagining that they will be handsomely rewarded for the behavior. They have figured out: our team is losing; David's team is going to win, and this is our chance to advantage ourselves and win favor with the future king.

It's important to understand the nation was hanging by a thread. This could have easily ignited another civil war, and thousands upon thousands of men, women and children could have died. All this was done simply to advantage themselves, so they show up to David; they have Ish-bosheth's head in their hands, and they are expecting David to applaud. "Look what we did! We rescued you! This is Saul's son, Ish-bosheth. Saul was your enemy; Saul has been trying to kill you, but *the Lord* has empowered us to seek vengeance for our lord, King David." Now interestingly, they kind of throw the Lord's name in there—that this was kind of a mission from God and we accomplished it, so where do we go to pick up our reward? Most of what they said was true. Now stop and think about it. In this moment, David has been waiting over seventeen years to be king. If you factor before he fled all the way back to when he was anointed before the Goliath story, possibly twenty years David has been waiting. For seventeen of those years, he has been miserable in the wilderness, surviving, hurt, disillusioned, disappointed, fearful—wondering why does it have to be this way, and where is God in all this, and struggling through years and years and years of difficulty and despair—now the last seven years engaged in a bloody civil war, and now, because of Rechab and Baanah, literally the way has been cleared to the throne. There is no one in David's way. The throne is his for the taking. A lesser man would have said, *"The ends justify the means. Let's just sweep this under the carpet; let's just spin it. Let's just somehow rationalize or reason this away, and let's get on with this thing*." But David understood what had been done was evil and wicked in the eyes of God, and regardless of the consequences, he would do the right thing.

David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said the them, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, when one told me, saying, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I

gave him for *his* news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood from your hand and destroy you from the earth?" Then David commanded the young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hung them up beside the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the grave of Abner in Hebron. (Vs. 9-12)

So I am sure that Rechab and Baanah were expecting great reward from David. They certainly were not expecting this. David says, *"You know, when the Amalekite told me that he had finished off Saul, he thought that was good news, and for that, I put him to death*." If you remember the story, David said to the Amalekite, "*Who gave you permission to kill God's anointed king?"*So about this time, you have to imagine the brothers are starting to wonder… uh oh. David goes on and describes what they had done and repeats information back from the death scene. He refers to Rechab and Baanah as **wicked men, who killed a righteous** or innocent **man.** He was **in his own house, on his bed**. So you get a sense this was about as cowardly an act as you could possibly do, and now for that they must die.

David has their hands and their feet cut off. In the ancient Near East, it was indicative of the fact that you fight with your hands; you go to and from war with your feet. So to cut off the hands and the feet was basically disabling your hands and your feet as a message that basically the bloodshed must stop. The bodies are pinned to a wall at a very public place in order for David to say, *"This behavior will not be tolerated. The bloodshed must stop*." Think about the potential of all those who thought maybe they could get on the king's good side by doing something like this. So David's message was *"This won't be tolerated; it must stop*!" Again you're talking about thousands of men, women and children whose lives hung in the balance of what would happen at this moment in the story.

When we look at David's decision to skillfully do the right thing, not to sweep it under the carpet, not to rationalize it, not to somehow just see it as a means to an end, but rather to call wicked, *wicked*, to call sin, *sin*, what allowed him to do that is what he knew to be true. Whenever you have a narrative like this, you're always looking at what is happening with the main character. David's the main character. The first words out of the mouth of the main character are critically important. So what are the very first words out of the mouth of David? He says, "**As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress**," this is the core belief of what David learned after seventeen long years that prepared him to be king. If you are inclined to mark your Bible, I would underline it; I would circle it; I would highlight it in some way, because this is the summary of what David learned after seventeen years in the *Wilderness School of Leadership* that would give him his core belief—that would lead him to become the greatest king in Israel. David understood that the only reason he was alive and the only reason he was now in a position to be king over Israel, is because Yahweh God, his God and Redeemer, is alive. God has been with him every step of the way, and has sovereignly superintended the steps to bring history to this moment. For seventeen years there were so many moments of confusion, so many moments of hurt, of disappointment, of stress, so many moments of fear—so many times he thought he would die. It's quite miraculous that he is at this moment.

This roots back in my opinion to the two cave stories from 1 Samuel. Cave story number one: David has access to kill King Saul in the cave. I think he intended to do so, but somewhere before the act, God convicted his heart and he realized to do so would be sin before God—and he stopped himself. The next chapter is that story with Nabal and Abigail, where Nabal has infuriated David, and David gathers his band of troops and they are headed to his camp with every intent of slaughtering Nabal and his people. But brave, courageous Abigail stops him, confronts him, and says, *"What are you doing? You're supposed to be God's man, and you are*

so angry right now you are about to slaughter these people." There's kind of this "ah-ha" moment where David suddenly realizes, "What am I doing? I am about to slaughter all of these people because I am so angry right now, and he acknowledges to Abigail that she is right, and that he ultimately must trust God, that he must choose to do the right thing in every circumstance, and the rest is up to God. It is a life changing, pivotal moment for David.

That's followed by the second cave story, where David has access to kill King Saul, but I don't think there was ever a moment in that story where he thought about that. He had opportunity, but he declared to Saul that he was God's anointed king, and he did not have permission from God to kill him. David would seek to do the right thing and the rest was up to God to deal with Saul. It was kind of this watershed, life-changing season for David.

Since that time there have been little hints along the way. As a matter of fact, at the end of chapter three, what gave David the confidence to only deal with Joab as far as he thought he could without starting another civil war? Answer: He trusted ultimately God would deal with Joab. Ultimately, God would be the judge. But now he states it emphatically! This is what he has learned after seventeen years in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*—that David is in partnership with God, and God is alive and He's real and He's with him—that God is the King of Israel. David is the human king under the Master King. David understands to be spiritual leader, he has to be a good follower; he has to humble himself under the mighty hand of God, and God will exalt him at the proper time. David had learned, come what may, his responsibility was to do the right thing in every circumstance, and God would have to take care of the rest.

So is it finally time, after all this, for David to ascend on the throne of Israel? We'll have to find out next week. As we wrap this up for this morning, what is the relevance of this story to us? To understand that God has called us to do the right thing in whatever circumstance faces you today. So how do you do that? In a selfish, self-absorbed culture like ours, that can be complicated; it can be difficult. How do we do it? The answer is: there's something you need to know and believe to actually live that way. I understand as a Christ follower, that at the end of the story, there's only one opinion that matters. There may be lots of people on planet earth that have lots of opinions about me, but there's only one opinion that matters, and that opinion is God's—and God views me more wonderfully than anyone on planet earth. I stand right in the presence of a holy God, and God loves me and God celebrates me, and God dances over me, and God delights in me as His child. No one can change that, and no one can take that away. That's true, not because I'm a preacher, not because I've been really good this week, not because I'm real religious, not because I'm somehow self-righteous. It doesn't have to do with any of that. It's because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. On the basis of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, my Redeemer has delivered me from all my distress—from the distress of my sin, from the bondage of my sin, from the condemnation of my sin, from the power of my sin. And He has declared me to be righteous in the presence of a holy God. Because of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, God has offered me salvation freely as a gift that I simply receive by faith. And on the basis of that salvation, on my best days, but also on my worst days, God declares me right in His presence because when He sees me, He doesn't see my sin; He doesn't see my performance. He sees the righteousness of Christ, and there's no one on planet earth that can take that away or can change that.

This morning, we celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Savior in baptism. Every one of these people— sinners, misfits and losers like all of us—but on the basis of their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, stand right in the presence of God today and forever. And on their best days and on their worst days, God celebrates them; God delights in them; God dances over them, and God declares them to be right in His presence—and no one on planet earth can ever change that or take it away!

We understand as Christians we go through life in partnership—we don't go through life alone—and that God is with me. My Redeemer lives, and God is sovereign; He's alive, and He's with me. I understand in every moment, in every decision I make, there is my part, and my part is to do the right thing no matter what. The rest is up to God, and I will trust Him with that. Without a shadow of doubt I tell you this morning, "I know my Redeemer lives," and I tell you this, "If God is for me, you tell me who can stand against me?"

Our Father, we celebrate this magnificent truth this morning, that on the basis of the finished work of Jesus, on the basis of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, You have offered us salvation freely, as a gift of Your grace. On the basis of that salvation, we stand right in Your presence as a holy God. God, this morning, we celebrate every single one of these people that will be baptized this morning. Regardless of whether this week was a good week or a lousy week, whether they obeyed or whether they blew it, on the basis of the finished work of Christ, they stand right in Your presence, today and forever. Lord, You love them; You celebrate them; You dance over them. And no matter what anyone else in this world may say, God, You declare them righteous now and forever. God, that's what we celebrate this morning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. Do you believe the ends justify the means? Why or why not?

2. What are examples of ways people rationalize or justify behavior today if it helps promote their cause? Do Christians do this?

3. The more secular we become as a culture the more selfish we become which means the more people will advantage themselves by disadvantaging others. How do you see this playing out in our culture?

Bible Study

1. Review the delicate circumstances of II Samuel 3 and how David skillfully responded along the way. What do we learn about David and his faith from verse 39 that gives us a clue as to what enabled him to respond as he did?

2. Read II Samuel 4:1-12. About the time it seems David has positioned both the nation and himself in just the right place to bring about peace and a united kingdom what happens? What are the motives of the assassins? What is their claim (v. 8)? How might a leader with less integrity have responded to what Rechab and Baanah did?

3. It seems, through David, God has brought the nation to a point where Ish-bosheth was not wanting a fight and Mephibosheth was not able to take the throne so David was the obvious choice to everyone. Then Rechab and Baanah risk it all with their cold blooded murder. What do we learn about the Sovereignty of God and the choices people make? How do these both coexist and how does that effect how we lead? Is it, "God helps those who help themselves" or "Let go and let God" or something in between?

4. What has David learned in the wilderness school of leadership (v. 9) and how does that effect how he is leading in this story? What is David's part and what is God's part?

5. Why does David respond the way he does and how does his skillful response reflect his integrity and his faith in God? How does David model I Peter 5:6? What seems to be one of the biggest lessons David has learned in the wilderness school of leadership to prepare him to be a great king?

Application

1. How does knowing that we have a Redeemer in Jesus and that our Redeemer lives change how we respond to challenges in life? How does knowing that the only opinion that ultimately matters is God's and God sees us "in Christ" effect how we handle unfair accusations and treatment?

2. When we encounter unfair treatment as a Christian, how does knowing that my Redeemer lives effect my response? What is my part and what is God's part?

3. What does it mean personally for you, in the circumstances that define your life right now, to reject the idea that the ends justify the means and to consistently stand for righteousness?

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