



That beautiful hymn,<sup>1</sup> written by Isaac Watts over 300 years ago is based on Psalm 23, which was written by David over 3000 years ago. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the Great Shepherd who faithfully feeds and leads his sheep until we are eternally at home with him. Thank you, choir, for that encouraging reminder.

I invite you to open your Bibles with me to 2 Samuel 4 (p. 240). It's been a month since our last message on the life of David. I've been dying to get back to this narrative, despite the fact that many people have been dying *in* this narrative! The final chapter of 1 Samuel begins with bad news, saying, "the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa" (v. 1). Verse 6 says, "Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together." Talk about a bloodbath!

Then in 2 Samuel 1, David kills the man who claims to have killed Saul. In chapter 2, Abner the commander of Saul's army, picks a fight with Joab, the commander of David's army. A dozen men from each army do battle at the Pool of Gibeon. All twenty-four die. Then a fierce battle ensues. Abner and his men are routed by Joab and his men. Joab's brother Asahel pursues Abner, and Abner ends up killing him. By the time the battle is over, nearly four hundred men die – 95% of them from Abner's army.

At the beginning of chapter 3 we are told, "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker" (2 Samuel 3:1).

Saul's sole surviving son Ish-bosheth is trying hard to hold on to his father's kingdom, but he is fast losing his grip. Later in chapter 3, Abner defects from Ish-bosheth to David but then ends up getting killed by Joab as payback for killing his brother Asahel.

This brings us to chapter 4, where more bloodshed occurs. The title of today's sermon is:

### **THE MURDER OF ISH-BOSHETH 2 Samuel 4**

After I preach, Rich Christman and I will present an overview of our ministry in India. You may be wondering how we're going to transition from the sermon to the slide show. After all, what does the murder of Ish-bosheth have to do with missions in India?" The answer is: *a lot!* Just as God was establishing and strengthening the kingdom of his servant David in ancient Israel, so also God has established and is strengthening the kingdom of his Son, David's greater descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, today.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Watts, "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need" © 1719. In the public domain.

Furthermore, throughout history, God has used people to fulfill his promises. Just as there was a right way and a wrong way to become king in Israel, so there is a right way and wrong way to fulfill the promises of God in our lives.<sup>2</sup> God is sovereign, but we are still responsible for the choices we make and the things we do.

In this chapter, two men try to bring about the kingdom their own way rather than God's way. As a result of their actions, they think they're going to be praised, but instead they're punished. The very king they thought would commend them commands them to be executed.

So, let's look at this account in 2 Samuel 4 and see how it applies to our lives today.

### **The Cowardly Conspirators (vv. 1-7a)**

<sup>1</sup> When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. <sup>2</sup> Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon a man of Benjamin from Beeroth (for Beeroth also is counted part of Benjamin; <sup>3</sup> the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been sojourners there to this day).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

<sup>5</sup> Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-bosheth as he was taking his noonday rest. <sup>6</sup> And they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped.

<sup>7</sup> When they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him.

- 2 Samuel 4:1-7a

This grisly murder was all the more heinous because these men were supposed to be on Ish-bosheth's side! They were two of his most trusted soldiers – two captains in fact – of his paramilitary combatants who would exercise guerilla warfare against opposing enemies.

Only now they employed those same tactics against their own commander-in-chief. They ambushed him on his own bed, stabbing him in the stomach, and cutting off his head. The deed is described in verses 5 and 6 and is then retold with additional details in verse 7. The repetition is deliberate. It's the writer's way of saying in a mocking tone, "Look at how macho these men are – so macho that they can kill a man in his sleep!"<sup>3</sup> Rechab and Baanah may appear courageous, but Scripture exposes them for the cowards they really are.

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<sup>2</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*. The NIV Application Commentary, gen. ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2003), 444.

<sup>3</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*. Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999, reprinted 2018), 51.

## The Spiritual Spin (vv. 7b-8)

They took his head and went by the way of the Arabah all night,<sup>8</sup> and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, “Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life.

The Lord has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring.”

- 2 Samuel 4:7b-8

Picture the scene. Rechab and Baanah have in their possession the head of the man they just murdered, and they present it to David as a trophy of God’s justice working through them. As one commentator put it,

They come with blood on their hands but theology on their lips, expecting that the latter will magically bleach the former. Murder always seems more pleasant when wrapped in religious considerations.<sup>4</sup>

Rechabs and Baanahs still exist in the church today – people who use spiritual lingo to cover their sin. For them theology isn’t biblical truth that elicits worship but a means by which they seek to justify themselves.<sup>5</sup>

- ⇒ I’ve seen this happen multiple times on an *individual* level, especially in the matter of divorce. A husband leaves his wife for another woman saying they were meant to be together – that this was God’s plan, that the first marriage was a mistake, and that God wants them to be happy.

This sort of theological spin can be applied to most any sin. People take Scripture out of context and make it say anything they want it to say to accommodate their sin.

- ⇒ This happens not only at an individual level but also an *institutional* level. Remember last fall when California Governor Gavin Newsom, sponsored billboards promoting the slaughter of unborn infants by quoting Jesus’ words in Mark 12:31, “Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these.”
- ⇒ But the state is not the only institution that puts a spin on sin. Religious institutions and denominations adopt this same strategy to stay on good terms with the culture. Nowadays this is most apparent in their departure from biblical teaching on marriage and human sexuality to affirm the LGBTQ lifestyle in the name of Christian love. In essence they’re saying that the way to love the sinner is to affirm them in their sin. That’s not what Scripture teaches. They’re twisting it. They’re putting a spin on sin. That’s why Webster UMC voted to disaffiliate from their denomination last Tuesday. That same day, Al Mohler stated on The Briefing, “Sexual Liberation Requires a New Religion.” Dr. Mohler rightly called it going down the “road of theological insanity.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Mohler, “Sexual Liberation Requires a New Religion: The Free Fall of the Liberal Churches from Historic, Orthodox Christianity.” *The Briefing, Part 1*, 21 March 2023 [online]. Retrieved on 25 March 2023 from <https://albertmohler.com/2023/03/21/briefing-3-21-23>; Internet.

In his second NT letter, Peter warns us not to be carried away by the error of lawless people who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16-17). Jude sounds the same alarm, warning us of “ungodly people [who] have wormed their way into churches, saying that God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives” (Jude 4 NLT). Jude then says, “The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (v. 4b NLT).

***No amount of spin can justify a sin.***

We see this principle play out in David’s response to Rechab and Baanah.

**The Righteous Retribution  
(vv. 9-12)**

<sup>9</sup> But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity,  
<sup>10</sup> when one told me, ‘Behold, Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news.  
<sup>11</sup> 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 at your hand and destroy you from the earth?” <sup>12</sup> And David commanded his young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron.

- 2 Samuel 4:9-12

Rechab and Baanah got the very opposite that they were hoping for. Instead of being commended, they were condemned. Instead of being exalted, they were executed.

This act of justice by David in a little town called Hebron was a foretaste of the divine justice that will be enforced throughout the whole earth by David’s greater descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ. During his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphatically declared,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’

- Jesus Christ  
(Matthew 7:21-23)

These same words that should strike fear in those who bless God’s name while refusing to obey him, should encourage those who are truly believers and suffer injustice today. Paul reminded Timothy, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). This is true for the Muslim who becomes a follower of Jesus and gets disowned by her family ... or the high school student that gets mocked in class for believing that God created the world ... or the employee that gets passed on a promotion because of

his Christian profession ... or the wife whose husband has gone after a newer model and left her with nothing. "Whatever the particulars, God's people must be assured that the time will come when the Davidic King will institute Hebron justice throughout the earth."<sup>7</sup>

Will you be ready to stand before the King on that day? The good news is, you can be! Jesus died on the cross to satisfy the justice of God against the sins of all who would trust in him for salvation. Three days after he died, Jesus rose triumphantly from the grave proving that he, not sin, would have the last word. The apostle Paul, who was an eye-witness of the resurrected Christ, declared,

"God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead."

- Acts 17:30-31 NLT

Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Our job – our privilege – is to proclaim the good news, express our faith in love, and leave the results with God. We don't need to compromise or come up with our own ideas about how to win the culture. God's word is sufficient. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

This is the message that pastors and churches need to hear. That's why I had Pastor Mike read Paul's final charge to Timothy earlier in our service. There is a right way and a wrong way to seek to advance the kingdom of God. Pastor Christian Lwanda reminded us of this in the final Together for the Gospel conference last year.<sup>8</sup>

Now do you see the connection between the murder of Ishbosheth and the mission of the church? There's a right way and wrong way to advance God's kingdom. With that in mind, here are three concluding principles:

1. **The promises of God require patience and purity on our part.** If we *believe* God's word, then we will *behave* accordingly. This leads to principle #2:
2. **It's never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right.** The ends don't justify the means. God expects his work to be done his way from start to finish. So, think biblically, and live accordingly.
3. **Gratitude begets fidelity.** In 2 Samuel 4:9, David acknowledged the Lord as the one who redeemed his life out of every adversity. In Psalm 116 David testified, "I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live." May that be our testimony as well. Let us do God's work God's way, fully trusting God's word with a heart full of love for all that he has done and continues to do for us.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>8</sup> To watch Christian Lwanda's message, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnVyEDAJ6FE>. The specific segment I shared during the sermon starts at 13:05 and ends at 17:32.