



Ruthie and I are grateful for your prayers and expressions of sympathy and concern these last few weeks following the homegoing of Ruthie's mom. We are truly blessed to belong to such a wonderful church family.

I'm also grateful for fellow preachers like Reid Ferguson and Mike Smith, who serve us God's word faithfully, humbly, lovingly and joyfully. While preparing his sermons, Pastor Mike also completed a research paper and Hebrew exam and got an A on both! So, you can be happy for Pastor Mike despite his disparaging comment about the city of Buffalo!

Let's open our Bibles to 2 Samuel 10 (p. 243, pew Bible). The events of this chapter follow those of chapter 9 – not for the sake of *chronology* but for the sake of *contrast*. Chapter 9 recounts David's kindness toward Mephibosheth and Mephibosheth's gratitude in receiving it. The king's kindness is displayed again in chapter 10, but this time instead of being gratefully received, it's thrown back in his face.

The King's Kindness Is Despised (vv. 1-4)

"After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. And David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me" (vv. 1-2). The words "deal loyally" represent the same Hebrew expression that is used multiple times in chapter 9, where it is translated "show kindness." Other versions of the Bible show this consistency by maintaining the same translation in chapter 10. For instance, the New International Version (NIV) translates verse 2 this way: "David thought, I will show kindness to Hanun, son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me." Continuing in the second half of verse 2 through verse 4, we read:

So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites. ³ But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?" ⁴ So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away.

- 2 Samuel 10:2b-4

Just as King David had showed kindness to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of King Saul, so now David showed kindness to Hanun, the new king of the Ammonites. This kindness was even more amazing because the Ammonites had a long history of hostility toward the people of Israel. During the Exodus, they denied Israel's

request to pass peacefully through their territory. Then once Israel had settled into the land of Canaan, the Ammonites allied themselves with the Moabites in attacking Israel.

Then when Saul became king, his first conflict was against the Ammonites. Nahash had threatened horrific violence against the people of Jabesh-Gilead, who were rescued by King Saul and the armies of Israel (see 1 Samuel 11). So, it seems that Nahash was nice to David during the reign of King Saul only because Nahash hated Saul.

But now Nahash was dead and his son Hanun was on the throne. Typically, it took time for a new king to get acclimated to his position and to consolidate his power. This period of transition made him vulnerable to attack. But David showed Hanun kindness instead. He sent a delegation to express his condolences to a son whose father had just died.

But instead of receiving the king's kindness, Hanun rejected it abruptly and maliciously. Why? Because Hanun chose to believe his top military leaders and advisors. They interpreted David's kindness as a ruse – that his servants were there to snoop around and size up the city so David could conquer it. He misread David's intentions entirely. Too often we're like Hanun and his leaders in that regard. John Woodhouse writes,

They displayed an attitude that poisons too many human relationships. Distrust prevents us from seeing good intentions from what they are. We are prone to suspicion. Sometimes, of course, suspicion is justified, but when it makes us incapable of seeing the goodness of someone else's words, actions, or intentions, much harm is caused.¹

Indeed. Before this conflict was over, tens of thousands of men would die.

***Despising the kindness of God's king
leads to terrible consequences.***

The Ammonites showed their contempt for David's kindness by humiliating his men. Throughout history, beards have often been perceived as a sign of gruff manliness. So, cutting off the beards of David's men was probably meant to emasculate them. Hanun degraded them further by cutting off their garments at the waist and sending them back to David in shame. Even today we use the idiom, "getting caught with your pants down" which speaks of finding oneself in an embarrassing and vulnerable position. Hanun's contemptuous treatment of David's men was no less than a declaration of war.

**The King's Compassion Is Aroused
(v. 5)**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *compassion* as "sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others." This is what David demonstrates in verse 5: "When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, 'Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return.'" This is the

¹ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 270.

second time King David “sent.” Just as David had sent a delegation to show kindness to Hanun, so David now sent more messengers to show kindness to his humiliated servants. Their clothes could be replaced right away, but not so their beards. So, David graciously gave them the time they needed to make that happen, because he cared for them and was committed to restoring their honor. Such was the kindness of the king.

Whereas the king “sent” his representatives to show kindness, his enemies “sent” for reinforcements to initiate conflict.

The King’s Enemies Combine Forces (vv. 6-8)

⁶ When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men.

⁷ And when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men.

⁸ And the Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate, and the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country.

- 2 Samuel 10:6-8

Instead of seeking the king’s pardon for their brazen rejection of his kindness, the Ammonites sought reinforcements by hiring Syrian troops from the north.

When David got wind of this, he sent Joab and all the elite troops. This is the third time David has “sent,” and even this move seems to be a show of kindness, albeit passively. Rather initiate conflict, David puts his army on standby. The Ammonites are the ones that initiate hostilities. It reminds me of Psalm 120:7: “When I speak of peace, they want war!” (NLT). That was certainly the case here. Verse 8 says, “The Ammonites marched out and arranged themselves in battle formation at the city gate.” (We know from 11:1 that the city was Rabbah, the Ammonite capital, located east of the Jordan River.) The Ammonite forces lined up at the city gate, while the Syrian forces took up their positions in the open countryside.

Where was David’s army? Sandwiched in between them.

The King’s Armies Fight Courageously (vv. 9-12)

⁹ When Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the best men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians.

¹⁰ The rest of his men he put in the charge of Abishai his brother, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites. ¹¹ And he said, “If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. ¹² Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him.”

- 2 Samuel 10:9-12

With the enemy before them and behind them, Joab and his brother Abishai fought back-to-back with “the best men of Israel.” It reminds me of that famous scene in the movie *Gladiator* when Maximus says to his fellow gladiators in the Roman coliseum, “Whatever comes out of these gates, we’ve got a better chance of survival if we work together. ... If we stay together, we survive.”

Joab didn’t know if he and Abishai and their fellow soldiers would survive this battle, but they resolved to fight *together* and fight *courageously* because they were fighting for the *right cause*. They were fighting for God’s people and the places God had given them.” Joab didn’t know how things would turn out, but he trusted “the Lord [to] do what seems good to him.” John Woodhouse makes another good observation at this point, stating,

Joab’s words to Abishai stand at the heart of this chapter. He makes the only direct reference to God in the whole chapter, and what he said illuminates the whole episode. The words are a wonderful expression of faith in God. Faith is knowing that the Lord is good and that he does what is good. What is good is decided by God, not us. But with this faith we can face any enemy, any situation, any threat with a strength that comes from this faith. As we walk honestly before God, doing what he approves, he will give us strength that surpasses whatever power confronts us (cf. Romans 8:31-39).²

The King’s Victory Is Secured (vv. 13-19)

¹³ So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him.¹⁴ And when the Ammonites saw that the Syrians fled, they likewise fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

- 2 Samuel 10:13-14

The mere sight of Joab and his mighty men struck fear in the hearts of the Syrians. They turned tail and ran. When the Ammonites saw the Syrians fleeing, they followed suit. The battle was over before it began. With the threat now gone, Joab and his men withdrew. After all, they had been sent by David for defensive purposes, not to initiate conflict.

Every time David “sends,” it’s to show kindness. But that’s not the case with his enemies.

¹⁵ But when the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered themselves together. ¹⁶ And Hadadezer ***sent*** and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the Euphrates. They came to Helam, with Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer at their head.

- 2 Samuel 10:15-16, emphasis mine

We know from chapter 8 (v. 3) that Hadadezer was king of Zobah. Apparently, he was the most powerful of the Syrian kings. After their armies were routed by Israel, Hadadezer had

² *Ibid.*, 275.

them regroup at Helam. We're not sure where this city was located, but the available evidence suggests that it was forty miles east of the Sea of Galilee, north of Rabbah, where the previous battle had occurred. This made it "a suitable place to prepare secretly for a renewed assault on Israel, this time with an expanded army. And Hadadezer put his own general in charge. His name was Shobach."³

¹⁷ And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together and crossed the Jordan and came to Helam. The Syrians arrayed themselves against David and fought with him. ¹⁸ And the Syrians fled before Israel, and David killed of the Syrians the men of 700 chariots, and 40,000 horsemen, and wounded Shobach the commander of their army, so that he died there. ¹⁹ And when all the kings who were servants of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Syrians were afraid to save the Ammonites anymore.

- 2 Samuel 10:13-19, emphasis mine

Scripture warns, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). – And the Syrians fell big-time. Well over forty thousand men died. Hadadezer's pride and "persistent aggression had led to a violent confrontation with King David himself. At that point every knee was forced to bow to Israel's king."⁴

Conclusion

Do you see how this historic account encapsulates the features of a far bigger Story? The Lord God is the ultimate King who shows us kindness every day of our lives. The apostle Paul declared in Acts 17:25, "[God] himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else" (NIV). Every breath we take, every beat of our heart, everything we enjoy in life is an expression of God's kindness toward us.⁵ The same was true of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden.

But just like Hanun's advisors got him to distrust David and despise his kindness, so the devil, that old serpent, got Adam and Eve to doubt God, distrust his motives, and defy him. Humans have been doing that ever since. "No one does good, not even one. ... The way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:12b, 17-18). They consume God's gifts while showing contempt for God himself. They disregard his word, disobey his commands, and disrespect his name. But one day all who do so will pay the price for dishonoring God and rejecting his kindness. Paul says in Romans 2,

Do you suppose, O man ... that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

- Romans 2:3-5

³ Ibid., 276.

⁴ Ibid., 277.

⁵ Ibid., 267.

One day God's judgment will be revealed, but his kindness has already been revealed through David's greater descendant, the ultimate King, Jesus Christ. In him, says Paul in Titus 3:4, "the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared" (NIV). On the cross, Jesus suffered the penalty we deserve for our sins. Three days later God raised his Son from the dead, proving he had accepted his sacrifice for all who repent of their sin and receive Jesus as the ultimate expression of God's love and kindness. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Paul's message in Acts 14 is the same message we preach today. Paul announced,

"We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills our hearts with joy."

- Acts 14:15b-17

Just like David's messengers were mistreated when they conveyed the king's kindness, so Paul and the other apostles suffered humiliation and mistreatment for bearing the good news of Jesus Christ. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). But just as King David restored the honor of his men, so Christ Jesus will reward and vindicate his faithful servants when he appears from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus (2 Thess. 1:7-8). Today I urge everyone hearing my voice to heed the warning of 2 Samuel 10:

***Despising the kindness of God's king
leads to terrible consequences.***

David showed kindness to Mephibosheth, and he gratefully received it. David showed kindness to Hanun, but he arrogantly rejected it. The question before you is: *What will you do with Jesus? Neutral you cannot be. One day your heart will be asking, "What will he do with me?"* David was patient with his enemies. But "their persistent aggression led to a violent confrontation with King David himself."⁶ At that point many perished, and every knee was forced to bow. God has exalted Jesus to the place of *highest* honor and given him the name *above all other names*, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

"If only the Ammonites had welcomed David's kindness . . . If only they had sought his pardon for their abuse of his kindness while there was still time."⁷ Let's make sure that our response to the kindness of King Jesus is not like that of the foolish Ammonites. "Let us receive our kind and patient king with thankfulness and joy."⁸

⁶ Ibid., 277.

⁷ Ibid., 278.

⁸ Ibid.