

Title: A Step Forward?
Text: 2 Samuel 3.1-21
Theme: The faithfulness of God in the face of man's continual failings
Series: 2 Samuel #5
Prop Stmtnt: The faithfulness of God is displayed even through the failings of man.

The other day someone came into the kitchen and asked what I was doing. I said that I was making chili and they commented on how good it smelled. I then said that the only thing that I had done so far, was fry up bacon, but if you start with bacon, you usually end up with something good. That is one of my rules for cooking. When it comes to life, if you start with the gospel, you will end up somewhere good. There are two reasons for that. 1) Jesus is exactly what we need and all that we need. 2) He is our only real option. Everything else and everyone else that we may turn to in order to believe in, save us, change us is broken. But we are really slow learners. This is why the Bible has two parts. The first part (OT) covers 4,000 years of history that shows over and over and over how much we need Jesus. The second part (NT) is the revealing of Jesus, our Savior. ***The story of the OT points to Christ even as it shows us how much we need Christ.*** For example, I am preaching through the historical book of 2 Samuel which is the story of David's reign as king of Israel. David is one of the good ones. In fact, David is one of the best OT characters. But when you get a close up look at David, you see a lot of problems and some serious flaws. Even the good ones are broken. The life and reign of David points to Christ even as it reveals how much we need Christ.

For example, God made a promise to David. You will be king over my people Israel. David is going to reign over a unified nation. He is going to defend his people. He is going to provide for his people. He is going to expand the boundaries of the kingdom and the fame of God. In fact, the line of David will never end. All of those point to Christ who was born in the line of David. But, at the same time, David is clearly not Jesus. David is a sinner. He has some serious failings. David faces the consequences for those. God loves David so much that David never gets away with his sin. That is why studying David is heavy and hopeful. It is delightful and disappointing and often those two extremes come at us at the same time. Our text is an example of that.

Read Text:

When you are in your 60's, 7 years is a long time. When you are in your 30's, 7 years is like eternity. David was in his 30's and for 7 long years, there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David. It was a war that shouldn't have been, didn't need to be, and was only helping the enemy. David was not yet experiencing the fulfillment of God's promises. However, David's power and influence was getting stronger, while the house of Saul was getting weaker. And yet, in one area of leadership, David took a page from the Canaanite kings around him. It would make him look stronger, but in reality, would lead to catastrophic consequences. You see ...

1. **Worldly strength is godly weakness.** (2-5)

The chapter opens by saying that David's house is getting stronger and Saul's house weaker. Ish-bosheth is king, but he has no children. There is no future there. While in Hebron, David has children. He has sons! His future is practically ensured. That is a blessing. But the problem is, David has multiple wives. David has 6 sons, by 6 women. In the Ancient Near East kings had multiple wives in order to have multiple sons for security (mortality rates were much higher), status, loyal representatives and political alignments. Two of David's wives were from Judah. One wife was the daughter of the king of Geshur. Geshur was just north of where Ish-bosheth was. This was particularly strategic. Talmai, the king of Geshur was gaining an ally and was planting one of his own in David's palace who could keep him in the know. This was very common. The daughters of kings were political pawns and forces all at the same time. Having 6 wives was a recipe for disaster to begin with, but stir the pot with power, political positions, and it gets really messy, real fast. To the world, David looks strong. He already has 6 boys. His line is going to continue. He will not be a lame duck king. But these verses plant the seeds that will eventually undo the very thing that happens in this chapter. David's private life will have terrible consequences on his public life. Amnon rapes Tamar. Absalom murders Amnon and then rebels against David and would have dethroned David except Absalom was killed by his cousin Joab. Adonijah makes a power move for the throne only to be outwitted by Bathsheba and is himself executed in the early days of Solomon's reign. And what David does with a few wives is an excuse for Solomon to clearly violate Deut. 17.17 which prohibits a king from taking multiple wives. This is what opens the door for Israel to return so quickly to her pagan past. It's not all that different when parents want their daughter to marry into a prominent family instead of seeking a godly husband. Marriage that is based on pursuing standing, status, political or economic gain is never going to be what God intended. For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and be united like super-glue to, be welded to, be one with. That's the point. Sadly, David used marriage for other reasons and it became a grief for him and for the nation.

Why would David violate such a clear command? Well, probably for the same reasons that we do, right? David was in a position of authority and it is easy to think that if I am in authority, I get to do what I want. David was accumulating wealth. If you get a few bucks in your pocket you are tempted to feel large and in charge. David was under a lot of pressure. He was responsible for a lot of people. It's how I handle stress. My job is hard. We're in a challenging place in our marriage. My boss was harsh today. It is easy to justify your sin by saying that I just needed a diversion, I needed some me-time, I needed to focus on me, it's just this little thing, etc. But, every time we think that and do that, we are saying that my law is greater than God's law and that Jesus is not enough. Can we stop and confess this? Can we acknowledge the danger of this? We need to tell ourselves the truth. But habits become character and character becomes concrete. Is this what Abner was thinking? Let's see.

2. **Man's kingdom is not sustainable.** (6-11)

Abner is a force. He was the commander of the army under Saul. The army is clearly loyal to Abner and not to Ish-bosheth. Saul and three of his sons died in the battle. Abner did not and neither did Ish-bosheth. It is likely that Ish-bosheth was not in the battle. If that is the case,

then he would have no street creds with the soldiers. Abner wasn't the king, but he had the power. He made Ish-bosheth king and as we will see, he can unmake him king. Now, God had anointed David to be king. Abner wanted to retain his position of power and he would not have that under David, so Abner made Ish-bosheth king. This was an act of defiance against the expressed will of God. And, as you would imagine, it wasn't working. Abner and Ish-bosheth had a relationship that was bound to fail because they were both seeking to use the other. Abner does not respect Ish-bosheth and Ish-bosheth is afraid of Abner. This is a trainwreck. The closer you get to the center, the uglier it is. Abner wants power. He "was making himself strong in the house of Saul." How was he doing that?

a. Pride is an easily offended cancer.

Abner was climbing the corporate ladder in a company that was going bankrupt. It was like being VP of marketing for Bed, Bath and Beyond. It was as obvious to him as anyone else that his position did not have long-term security. Then comes verse 7. Saul had a concubine named Rizpah. Saul had two sons by her. Ish-bosheth accuses Abner of getting too friendly with Rizpah. It was well understood that getting involved with the king's harem or even the former king's harem was one of the ways someone could make a claim for the throne. This becomes an issue both with Absalom and then with Adonijah later in the book. Ish-bosheth's accusation may have been true. It is hard to imagine that Ish-bosheth would accuse Abner of this if it weren't. It may have been one of the ways Abner was getting influence in the palace. Those arrangements do more than share a bed, they share information. Abner is angered by the accusation, but he never denies it. That is really not surprising. There are all kinds of examples of people getting caught in sin who act offended at the accusation in an effort to deflect from the fact that it is true. This is clear and compelling evidence of sinful pride. If Abner were a godly man, he would be a humble man and he would be grieved over his sin, or grieved that people were thinking this about him. In fact, he would be grieved that Rizpah's reputation was dragged into this as well. One of the cancerous effects of pride is that you cannot have an honest discussion with someone about a problem that they have.

When questioned, or even accused, how do you tend to respond? If we are so easily offended we will never grow. What is the difference between these two responses: "I can't believe you just said this!" vs. "Help me understand why you think this may be true about me." In the first response, we are putting all of the blame on the other person and taking no responsibility at all for whatever we may have done to contribute to their opinion. In the second response, we are asking for clarification and help because it is possible that we have done something or they have heard something that led them to this conclusion and they are doing us a great favor by talking to us about this instead of others about us. Beloved, because of the gospel, we have the capability of having these conversations with each other that are beneficial. Let's say that your parent or spouse says to you, "Hey, can we talk about something?" And you sigh loudly and say, "What's it now?" That is so unhelpful because it is pride. You are acting as if you don't have anything that you need help with. We are followers of Christ, right? In other words, we have confessed that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves. We are people who apart from the grace of God deserve to be judged for our sins. Of course, someone has something that they

need to talk with me about. It is a mercy of God that there are not more than 50 at a time. The gospel is the grease that reduces the friction in relationships. You simply cannot have relationships like this without Jesus. Pride is too easily offended. That is why man's kingdom(s) is not sustainable.

Abner acts offended at the accusation of disloyalty, which may have all been an act because he is about to be disloyal. I tend to think that Abner is guilty. After all, what does he say? "*Am I a dog's head of Judah?*" That was supposed to be a terrible insult. We can guess that PetSmart hadn't expanded to that part of the world yet. But Abner is acting as if he is being accused of being connected with Judah, when that is exactly what he is about to do. So, yea, I think that the accusation is probably true. As Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, "The lady doth protest too much, me thinks." The narrator just presents the facts. It is up to the reader to put them together. Is Abner really offended, or is the accusation an opportunity to pretend to be offended so he can save his bacon by throwing Ish-bosheth under the bus and leverage his power and turn the kingdom over to David? Seriously, the only way that he could save his neck would be to find a way to gain a position in David's graces. And David is well known as a man of mercy. Abner threatens Ish-bosheth with this and Ish-bosheth can't answer him. Why not? Fear. Pride is the foundation and fear is the glue that holds the kingdoms of man together. The foundation is flawed and the glue isn't sticky enough to last.

b. Fear isn't sticky enough to last.

Relationships that are characterized by fear do not display Jesus. Ironically, Abner now conveniently pulls out the Bible. He uses the word of God (the promise of God that David will be king) as a threat against Ish-bosheth. Abner believes God, only when it is convenient for him and only when it gives him moral high horse. But, if Abner really believed this and really trusted God, he wouldn't have been fighting against David all of this time. This can happen with us. We can use our selective knowledge of the Bible to justify our anger without taking the entire counsel of God to heart. Knowing what God has said is eternally different than embracing what God has said. If pride and fear rule our relationships, then no matter how much content we may know, we are deceiving ourselves if we think that we are genuine believers. Even in our church, we can lose sight of the gospel and seek to hold each other hostage with the fear of what others think. There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear. Fear is not sticky enough to last. That is why fear is banished from the kingdom of Christ and since our life together as a body of believers is designed to be a taste of that kingdom, fear should not be part of the personality of our membership. In this case, Ish-bosheth fears how Abner is going to use his power. There was no love between these men and there was no loyalty. Apart from Christ, our kingdoms can only barter in pride and fear.

This is such a mess. This is not how we imagined David would come to the throne and not how David wanted to come to the throne. But Abner is the man in power. He made Ish-bosheth king and now he is going to unmake him king. At the same time, he is going to make David king. David, will have to be loyal to him, right?

3. No matter what, God will carry out his plan. (12-21)

This is a great example of how the sovereignty of God works through the choices of man. It also reveals some of the differences between the two kings and the two kingdoms. Abner thinks that he is in charge. He holds the levers of power and influence. He has the bargaining chips. He has what David wants and needs. In v.12 he sends messengers to David and promises to give the kingdom over to David. I am large and in charge and can make it happen. He sends messengers first because Abner has been killing David's men for 7 years. David has been doing the same to Abner's men. There is plenty of hostility that could be between them. But the response by David is merciful and shrewd. Immediately Abner is put in his place. He is not going to be dealing with David like he did with Ish-bosheth.

David does not accept Abner's offer without conditions. He agrees to make a covenant with Abner, but on this condition. Abner has to bring Michal, David's wife to him. Do you see what I see? Abner, you may have made a play for the throne through Rizpah, but I have a direct claim on the throne through Michal. That is my wife and you remember the price I paid for her and I aim to have her back.

Then, to further weaken Abner's hand and to show protocol, David sends a message to Ish-bosheth, the king and the brother of Michael. He doesn't ask. He orders. Give me my wife. Ish-bosheth does that and the scene is pathetic. Michal was given to another man by her dad. Her new husband is heart-broken over this. But he should never have married her. She was already married to David. Michal was not his to marry and she was not Saul's to give away. But, being married to the king's daughter clearly had some perks and he did so. But when a relationship is started on a faulty basis, it is no surprise that it does not end up too well. This was a shrewd move by David. I don't think it was motivated by love, but was a visible reminder to the northern kingdom that David had a right to the throne.

Abner now sets out to make it happen. His speech to the elders is telling because it sounds as if they wanted David as their king. So, ever the opportunist, Abner is acting like he is doing them a big favor, when he is trying to save his bacon. He then talks with the people of Benjamin. All of this takes time. But he gets their agreement and with that news in hand, he and 20 of his men come to Hebron to meet with David. David makes a feast for them. Wow. There is peace. There is peace in the land and the nation is about to be unified under one king. Finally, we have some good news. Finally. And this is very good news, at least, it is for the moment.

David's kingdom is a foreshadowing of the kingdom of Christ. There are ways in which David and his kingdom point to Christ and ways in which David and his kingdom show how much they need Christ. That is clear, even here. Even though there are people who try to set up their own kingdom as the anti-kingdom, it will not last. Christ will have his throne and his people. But, the prominent figure in this account is Abner. Abner is a convenient follower of David, but not one of conviction. It was convenient for him that Ish-bosheth be king and now it is more convenient for David to be king. Abner plays them against each other, because Abner wants to rule his own life and destiny. I fear that there are way too many people who profess to follow Christ, but do

so only as a convenience. They want to use the king but not submit to him. If I follow Jesus, then I make the team, I get that job, that relationship, that child, that home, that life, that _____. But we are not in charge. We have no levers of power and we bring nothing to the table that Jesus needs. We bring our sin. We bring our failure. We bring our guilt. We bring our shame. By acknowledging our sin (confession) and trusting in Christ as our Lord (king) we take our hands off our rights and submit ourselves to our good, gracious and merciful king. He died for us. He rose again for us. He is returning for us and will reign with and over us. And we will feast with him and be at peace.