

Title: Deadly Assumptions
Text: 2 Samuel 4
Theme: good authority
Series: 2 Samuel
Prop Stmt: Good authority is not pursued at the expense of others.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are answering the question of: Who should be King? The ultimate answer is: Jesus. But the accounts in these books that get us to that conclusion are fascinating. In addition to character development, suspenseful plots, historical significance, there is amazing insight into the very nature of politics and power. In answering the question of who should be king, the writer helps us develop a proper theology of power. Our true beliefs about power are inseparably related to our views and beliefs about God. We are tempted to develop our views of power based on our world and our own hearts. However, what we see in our world (and how we are tempted to use authority) is often an abuse of it. We see this in 1 Samuel. The use and abuse of power in 1 Samuel is a pattern that has been on full display for thousands of years and it is this. People rise to power and often because they want to use that power for the good of others. But, once they get into power, they become intoxicated with and blinded by that power and use that power primarily (almost exclusively) to hold on to power. This was the story of Saul in 1 Samuel. It was ugly. It is repeated in Abner and Joab and thousands of others. Is this what all power is like? The answer is no. This is not how God designed power to be used. In our text there are two brothers who make deadly assumptions about power. And in the midst of a bloody and tragic conflict, there is one who uses his power for justice and not for revenge. In this we see a preview of Christ and a taste of how the church is to be.

Read Text:

Election season never ends. Fundraisers for candidates go on all the time and in many cases are nothing more than “pay-to-play” events. If you are a business or company, you do not want people in power to be against you. Why not? Because we assume that people in power will use their power to stay in power. Therefore, they will reward those who help them stay in power and punish those who do not. After the death of Saul, the elders of Judah made a decision to make David their king. They gave their loyalty to David. The commander of the army of Israel, made a decision to make Ish-bosheth the king of the northern tribes and the elders of the northern tribes (known as Israel vs. Judah) made the decision to go along with that. The real power was Abner. Abner propped up Ish-bosheth and was the security for the north. Now, Abner was dead. He had recently convinced Israel (the north) to change course and to now support David’s reign. He even convinced the tribe of Benjamin to do the same. But now Abner was dead. Was David behind this? Was this really a revenge killing by Joab, or was that the story that protected David from being blamed? Was David hellbent on getting revenge against the people who would not support him? Besides, who would protect them from the Philistines now?

1. **What do you trust in?** (1)

What do you trust in and can it sustain the weight of your happiness and keep you safe – forever? The things or people that we become the angriest about or the most excited about are usually what we entrust our happiness to and look to for our security. Ish-bosheth trusted in and resented Abner. Abner made Ish-bosheth king. Now, Abner was dead and Ish-bosheth lost hope. The northern kingdom of Israel trusted in Abner and when they heard he was dead, they were in a panic. What are you most concerned about? Is your concern an issue of trust. In other words, is this person, relationship, pet, object, reputation, able to sustain the weight of your happiness and able to protect you? What happens when what you trust in, fails, or in this case, dies? Israel's king was not worth trusting in. Any sense of security or hope was blown up when word of Abner's death got to them. They had no hope in their king and with good reason. He was not worth trusting in. If you are going to have a king, you need a king whom you can trust.

2. What is your protection plan? (2-4)

Who or what are you going to trust if what you are currently trusting, falls apart? What is your plan "B"? That is the point of these verses. Abner is dead. He was the one who propped up Ish-bosheth. Who can Ish-bosheth turn to? Well, there are two brothers, who may be able to help out. These guys, Baanah and Rechab were sons of Rimmon was actually from the tribe of Benjamin. Verses 2-3 give a little more background information to answer any questions the reader may have about them. Rimmon's family was from Beeroth which, 400 years before, was one of the cities of Canaanites that went in with the Gibeonites to deceive Joshua into making a covenant with them when the Israelites were taking over the land. Joshua should not have made that covenant, but he did and the Lord expected Israel to keep their word. So, there were these pockets of Canaanites who continued to live in Israel, all these years later. This will become an issue later on (chapter 21). At one point Saul attempted to wipe out the Gibeonites which was in violation of the covenant with them and God punishes Israel for that, until they deal with it. So, there is a little of that background here, but the main point is that with the death of Abner, there are a couple of guys, who were from the same tribe as Saul that Ish-bosheth could possibly look to in order to fill the void and help lead the army. But, as we are about to discover, like Abner, the guys who were in positions of leadership use their positions to betray their leader.

Is there anyone else who can help? Verse 4 answers that. Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, but in the panic following the defeat of Israel's army and the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, Mephibosheth either fell or was dropped and his legs were injured so badly, he was lame. This guy was too young and possibly could not stand, and certainly could not walk or run.

Political persons (people who are tasked with things of governance and oversight) and organizations give a great deal of thought, attention and importance to the issue of transferring power. Many groups have chosen to embrace family dynasties. Yes, there are many risks, but the chaos of overthrowing and changing governance power is viewed as being even riskier. In the last few years, I have been receiving an education on this issue in our military. The military invests a lot of time and attention into ceremonies that mark the transfer of authority in order to ensure that there is no gap in the command structure. When you have thousands of people

with access to weapons that can destroy the known world, it is really important to know who is in charge and to make sure everyone else knows as well. That makes sense. When there is a gap in leadership, chaos generally ensues. The community is fractured (as it is here in Israel), enemies can invade, civil war can break out and evil is not restrained. Therefore, political persons have to figure out how to have a smooth transfer of power. In this country, we pride ourselves on having freedom. We like our freedoms, but we are no different than all the humans in the past 6,000 years of known history. We will give up freedom for protection and security. It is that important. What do you do? Who do you turn to? What do you trust in when there is no one to turn to who can protect you?

So, Mephibosheth is not an option. Abner is dead. Ish-bosheth is a poor leader. And these two brothers? Well, they, like Abner see that there is really only one option. David should be the king and in fact, he will be the king. But they assume that David has a view of power the way they do. Their assumptions prove to be deadly, not just for Ish-bosheth but for themselves.

3. What do you believe about power? (5-8)

The narrator gives us details so we can get a clear picture of this event. Because these two guys were leaders in the military command, it appears that their presence in Mahanaim and at the palace did not raise any concerns. It also sounds like they had come up with a “reason” for their visit. Assuming they traveled from the Gibeon area, it probably took them a day and a half to reach the palace. It was also considered to be acceptable for them to go into the palace in order to get some wheat. Now, I may be reading too much into this, but it seems as if there is a complete breakdown in discipline. Ish-bosheth has reason to be afraid. Not only is he not protected, but the very ones who are supposed to be loyal find an opportune time to assassinate him. Did you notice how they did it? They killed him by stabbing him “in the stomach” just like Abner reluctantly did to Asahel, and Joab vengefully did to Abner, these guys do without any obvious reason. They betrayed their leader. They killed the king of their people. Then, after killing him (maybe or maybe not?), they cut off his head, and took it with them as proof of their deed and made their escape.

Just like the Philistines cut off the head of Saul on the field of battle, Ish-bosheth was treated in like manner, expect he was taking his noonday rest. So, far, we have no motive. Every murder is shocking. The murder of a king is traumatizing to an entire nation. If a king or a president can be assassinated, then, no one is safe. News of this will send shock waves through the north and as the readers, we know this. But, why? That question is about to be answered. These two brothers travel through the night. They do not go back home, nor do they use the same roads they did to get there. They travel south through the east side of the Jordan to be as undetectable as possible, which, admittedly is a bit challenging when you are carrying the head of the king.

Verse 8 answers the why question. These brothers killed Ish-bosheth because they thought that they would get rewarded by David. If they stayed loyal to Ish-bosheth, they would be loyal to a failure and a failing cause. In their minds, this was justification for assassination. And because

David was hungry for power like they were, he would reward them for what they did. That is what they assumed. They assumed that because they believed that. They believed that power was their god, their savior, their security, their identity, their hope and happiness. They believed that so deeply and so personally, they were willing to kill for it. They were willing to assassinate their king for it. And because they believed that (as well as many others), they assumed that David believed the same thing.

Everybody wants power, right? Everybody wants to be in charge, get what they want, be respected, maybe even feared a little bit, right? Everybody wants to be the name that others know, be powerful enough to hire or demand others do the menial stuff you don't like to do.

Look at how they express themselves (v.8). They don't call Ish-bosheth king, they call him the son of Saul, the enemy of David who sought David's life. They assumed that David hated Saul. They assumed that David hated Ish-bosheth. Then they said, "The LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and his offspring." Did you catch that? The LORD has avenged my lord! This is what the LORD did. We didn't assassinate an innocent man, the LORD did this.

The ways of God can never be used as an excuse for my sin. By invoking God for approval, they are actually revealing so much of their own beliefs. Their lives were not about God, not in the least. Yahweh was an excuse for them to get what they wanted. Yahweh was a means.

Related to that is what do you really believe about God?

4. What should you believe about power (God)? (9-12)

David is a king. David has power. David has influence and is accumulating wealth. David has what most people want, scheme and dream to have. We also know from our own hearts, from history and observing others, that having power usually means that you want more. Having influence is like drinking salt water. You want to have more influence, more fame, more land, more control. This is usual, but it is not right. When you entrust your life to God, you exist to make him known. You can rest in him. You can rest. That is exactly what David appeared to be doing. He trusted in God and was waiting on God. He did not invade the north. He did not plot the death of Ish-bosheth. He waited on God to fulfill God's promises. How did David use the authority that God gave him? He used it for justice and he did not abuse it to advance his own cause. That is the opposite of what these brothers thought because that is the opposite of what they believed. They thought they could get away with murder because they thought David would be delighted at the death of his political opponent.

What David said was not what these guys expected. In fact, David's response is part of why we love this guy and should love this guy. These are the moments when David looks like and points to Jesus. These guys have misrepresented God. David sets the record straight. What they have done is not motivated by a desire for God's glory and fame.

A. **Power is not for vengeance.**

These men presented the head of Ish-bosheth to David. They claim that their murderous actions were inspired by Divine vengeance. David is not impressed. In fact, he is angered. The Lord redeemed my life. The Lord has delivered me out of every adversity. Meaning, I trust in the Lord. I am not going to sin against God by taking matters into my own hand and I am not going to reward those who do. You should know that. There was a guy who thought he would be rewarded by telling me that Saul was dead. The guy claimed to have had a hand in it, but I now know that was not true. (based on what David says here) But, I had him killed. He confessed with his own mouth and was considered guilty. If I killed him, what do you expect me to do to you who executed a righteous man on his own bed?

David gives the order and his young men carry it out.

B. Power is for justice.