

Message #28

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Life of David

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DAVID AND DEALING WITH RESENTMENT

2 SAMUEL 14

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

A recent *New York Times* poll (6/27/2020) found that a majority of registered American voters describe themselves as anxious, exhausted, and angry. A couple of years ago a CNN survey found that 69% of Americans say that they are somewhat or very angry at the state of the nation. *Time* magazine was prompted to describe this as “the Age of Anger.” (2/20/2017) Cornell psychology professor David Pizarro told *Time*, **“We feel those emotions strongly in ways we didn’t used to.”**

There are all kinds of incidents and people and statements that are provoking this anger in our world. There are incidents of police brutality, efforts to defund the police, President Trump’s tweets, Nancy Pelosi’s statements, kneeling for the National Anthem, requirements to wear masks, people not wearing masks, governments slow to provide unemployment help, and riots in our cities.

Then there are the challenges that come from every day life--- from dealing with family and work and school and government. The danger is that these challenges can produce anger that turns into resentment which turns into destructive behavior. Leonard Holt was a paragon of respectability. He was a middle-aged, diligent lab technician who worked at a Pennsylvania paper mill for 19 years. He was a Boy Scout leader, a dad, a volunteer in the local fire department, and a regular church attender.

But there were things that bugged Leonard. He had a neighbor with whom he had arguments. Leonard was part of a car pool, but a number of the other participants quit riding with him because they perceived that he was reckless in his driving. Then there were people at work who seemed to shun him. He was passed over for promotion several times by people who had not been at the company as long as he had. Anger developed into resentment. One October morning Leonard stuffed two pistols into his coat pockets and drove to the mill. He walked into his shop and started shooting. He fired thirty rounds in all, killing several men whom he had known for more than fifteen years. (Swindoll, *Seasons of Life*, p. 332)

We need to learn how to manage feelings of anger that we have in our lives. We also do well to be sensitive to the resentments that people around us may have developed. Such is the concern of the passage before us this morning.

In our study of the life of David we have seen that David messed up big time when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and tried to cover it up by having her husband killed. God forgave him, but He also explained that there would be negative consequences for his behavior, especially in his family. Part of the problem was the multiple wives whom David had acquired.

We saw last week that Amnon, David's oldest son and apparent heir to the throne, became infatuated with his half sister Tamar. Amnon arranged a situation in which he raped her, but then he rejected her. Tamar's brother Absalom, the second son in line to the throne, was very ticked off by what his half-brother Amnon had done. He was also upset that his father, King David, did nothing about it. So two years later, Absalom set up a situation in which he killed Amnon. Then he fled the country. The text and interpretation of v. 39 of #13 in 2 Samuel is uncertain. My reading of it is that David's enthusiasm for going out against Absalom was spent. Today we will see how that relationship unfolds.

I.

In the first 20 verses of 2 Samuel #14 (PROJECTOR ON--- I. JOAB'S EFFORT TO...) (which is found on p. 265 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we are going to deal with JOAB'S EFFORT TO ACHIEVE RECONCILIATION. After Absalom's killing of his half-brother Amnon, this number two son went to Geshur. (GESHUR) Geshur was a small country to the east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. The king was Absalom's grandfather through Absalom's mother. According to v. 38 of #13 Absalom was there for three years.

Verse 1 of our passage (PROJECTOR OFF) says, "**Now Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom.**" The literal reading of the last clause is "**the king's heart was on Absalom.**" The preposition in question could be interpreted as "toward," implying love or affection for Absalom. It could be understood as meaning simply that David was thinking about Absalom. He was much on his mind and heart. Or it could mean that his heart was "against" Absalom. He was still angry with Absalom for what he had done.

By David's treatment of Absalom in the coming verses, it hardly seems that David's primary attitude toward Absalom is pure love. I suspect that the writer's intended meaning is that David is thinking a lot

about Absalom. He is conflicted with feelings of love and anger. It is a strange situation. Absalom is the apparent heir to the throne. Yet he has left the country. Unfortunately David seems to have no plan about how to deal with Absalom.

Thus, according to v. 2, **“And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, ‘Pretend to be a mourner and put on mourning garments. Do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead.’”** Joab is David’s nephew and chief general. He sees David’s failure to take action in this situation. Perhaps Joab realizes that Absalom may be the next king, and sees a need for him to be reconciled to his father and to be getting preparation for being king. David had cursed Joab for his murder of General Abner. Perhaps Joab hopes that he will have a better situation some day with King Absalom.

Joab saw that the prophet Nathan was effective in getting David to repent by telling a parable that had David as its subject. Perhaps that prompts Joab to get this wise woman he knows who comes from Tekoa to tell a story to get the results which he desires. (TEKOA MAP) The prophet Amos would later be born in Tekoa, which was six miles south of Bethlehem.

Verses 3-7 describe the mission that Joab gave this woman: **“Go to the king and speak thus to him.’ So Joab put the words in her mouth. When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and paid homage and said, ‘Save me, O king.’ (PROJECTOR OFF) And the king said to her, ‘What is your trouble?’ She answered, ‘Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. And your servant had two sons, and they quarreled with one another in the field. There was no one to separate them, and one struck the other and killed him. And now the whole clan has risen against your servant, and they say, “Give up the man who struck his brother, that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed.” And so they would destroy the heir also. Thus they would quench my coal that is left and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth.’”**

The story that Joab has this woman tell has similarities to David’s situation. In v. 37 of #13 we were told that David was mourning for his son every day. Both situations involve the death of a son at the hands of the other son. The future inheritance in both situations is at stake. There is a struggle between justice and mercy in both circumstances.

The application of the Old Testament law is a key factor in this woman’s story. The law regarding homicide is described in Numbers #35. Verses 16 & 17 describe murder weapons of iron and stone. Beginning in v. 18 we read (PROJECTOR ON--- NUMBERS 35:18), **“Or if he struck him down with a**

wooden tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. (NUMBERS 35:19) The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. (NUMBERS 35:20) And if he pushed him out of hatred or hurled something at him, lying in wait, so that he died, (NUMBERS 35:21) or in enmity struck him down with his hand, so that he died, then he who struck the blow shall be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.”

These verses describe what we would call premeditated murder. There was no police force back in this time. The closest male relative of a murder victim was tasked with the responsibility of killing the murderer. Maybe that is what we will have to go to if we defund the police, right? The story which the woman tells does not seem to involve premeditated murder.

Other circumstances of homicide are described beginning in v. 22: **(NUMBERS 35:22) “But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or hurled anything on him without lying in wait (NUMBERS 35:23) or used a stone that could cause death, and without seeing him dropped it on him, so that he died, though he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm, (NUMBERS 35:24) then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these rules. (NUMBERS 35:25) And the congregation shall rescue the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he had fled, and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.”**

In these circumstances, which we might call manslaughter, the perpetrator was required to move to one of six cities of refuge which were established throughout the country. He had to stay there until the high priest died. If the avenger of blood ever found him outside of the city, he had the right to kill him. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The situation of the two sons which the woman from Tekoa is describing would appear to fit this second scenario. But supposedly the extended clan is demanding the death penalty. Perhaps they want to claim the family inheritance, which would leave the woman destitute, and her husband's name would be forgotten. The story is designed to appeal to David's emotions.

Verse 8 back in our passage: **“Then the king said to the woman, ‘Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you.’”** David seems to be putting her off. She is not satisfied with this.

Verse 9: **“And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, ‘On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father’s house; let the king and his throne be guiltless.’”** She seems to be saying that David doesn’t have to involve himself. She will keep hiding her surviving son and will bear any blame without the king having to be involved.

But David responds in v. 10: **“The king said, ‘If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again.’”** David does make a commitment.

Verse 11: **“Then she said, ‘Please let the king invoke the Lord your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more, and my son be not destroyed.’ He said, ‘As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.’”** Thus comes the reassurance. Ironically Absalom is known for his hair.

Verses 12-13: **“Then the woman said, ‘Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.’ He said, ‘Speak.’ And the woman said, ‘Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again.’”** The woman is getting to the real point of the story. This is the message that Joab wanted to communicate. David is jeopardizing the welfare of the people of God with the possibility that Absalom could be killed. In neither case is innocence being declared or wrongdoing excused. But the situation of the two sons needs to be weighed against the broader impact of the possible demise of the two surviving sons.

Verse 14: **“We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.”** Death is inevitable, and life is irretrievable. It is like water that is spilled on the ground. It cannot be gathered up again. Just as God was merciful to you, David, so should you figure out a way to bring back your son.

Perhaps Absalom had some popularity in the country. Perhaps that is part of the reason that Joab was working to bring him back. There was also the thinking in the Ancient Near East that to leave one’s country was to depart from the God of that country. So wouldn’t God want one of his worshipers back in the country?

There is a picture here in this verse of the gospel. We all are banished ones. We are all sinners whose sin has driven us away from a holy God. In Isaiah #59 v. 2 (PROJECTOR ON--- ISAIAH 59:2) the Lord says,

“...but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”

Is there not a way for us to be brought back to Him? In Ephesians #2 vv. 4 & 5 (EPHESIANS 2:4-5) the Apostle Paul writes, **“...but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—”** Jesus’ death on the cross provided the satisfaction for the righteous judgment of God upon human sin. Because He was both man and God, His death on the cross served as a substitutionary payment for the penalty of our wrongdoing. Our responsibility is to accept this payment made in our behalf. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Back in vv. 15 & 16 in our text we read, **“Now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid, and your servant thought, ‘I will speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant. For the king will hear and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the heritage of God.’”** How David has dealt with Absalom, or not dealt with Absalom, has caused fear for this woman in regard to the disposition of her own case.

Verse 17: **“And your servant thought, ‘The word of my lord the king will set me at rest,’ for my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil. The Lord your God be with you!”** The king is the representative of God. He is expected to have godly wisdom.

Verses 18-20: **“Then the king answered the woman, ‘Do not hide from me anything I ask you.’ And the woman said, ‘Let my lord the king speak.’ The king said, ‘Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?’ The woman answered and said, ‘As surely as you live, my lord the king, one cannot turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has said. It was your servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant. In order to change the course of things your servant Joab did this. But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth.’”** David recognizes Joab’s involvement with this. Perhaps Joab has said things previously encouraging the king to reconcile with his son.

Reconciliation is usually a good thing. The people of God recognize that they have been objects of reconciliation with Him. Because He took the initiative in reconciling with us, we should be on the lookout to be reconcilers with others. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-19) In 2 Corinthians #5 vv. 18 & 19 Paul says, **“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the**

ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

II.

In vv. 21-33 of #14 we encounter DAVID'S INCOMPLETE EFFORT TO PROVIDE FORGIVENESS. (II. DAVID'S INCOMPLETE EFFORT...) We read in v. 21, **“Then the king said to Joab, ‘Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.’** Joab was perhaps hanging out near to where the woman was telling David her story. He has now achieved his desired outcome.

David's description of Absalom is interesting. The word that he uses is the Hebrew term for “youth.” Perhaps there is a hint in this of a problem. Perhaps he does not respect Absalom as a man. Perhaps he has been lenient toward Absalom because he has regarded him as a youth, an immature person.

Verses 22 & 23: **“And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, ‘Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant.’ So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem.”** Absalom, remember, has been hiding out in the kingdom of his grandfather for three years.

Verse 24: **“And the king said, ‘Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence.’ So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king's presence.”** There are problems here. Initially this story has the makings of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The erring son returns to his father, acknowledges his wrongdoing, and is welcomed back into the family. But there is no indication that Absalom admits that he had done anything wrong. There is no sense of sin before God or before his father.

David, on the other hand, allows Absalom to come back to Jerusalem. Yet he does not want to see him. This is incomplete forgiveness at best. There is a need for direct interaction between father and son. Absalom is still resentful about the lack of justice for his sister. David has not apparently acknowledged his failure as a father and a king. So resentment in Absalom festers. There is no indication of a discussion about Absalom's status. Is he still the crown prince? Absalom is left with uncertainty.

According to v. 25, **“Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.”** Absalom had the look of a king, or at least the look of a crown prince. Perhaps he already enjoyed some measure of popularity. Perhaps he had already been a frequent subject in *People* and *Esquire* magazine.

Verse 26: **“And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight.”** Two hundred shekels would be about five pounds.

Having lots of hair was regarded as a sign of virility. You may remember the incident when ambassadors from David went to the king of Ammon, and he mistreated them by cutting off half of their beards. That was regarded as the worst of insults.

The Hebrew word for “heavy” in v. 26 has a double meaning. Its original and basic meaning is “heavy.” But it comes most often in the Old Testament to mean “glory,” or “glorious.” There is an indication here that Absalom’s hair was not only heavy on him, but it was also glorious to him. For religious Jews who were keeping the vow of a Nazirite, refraining from cutting the hair was a sign of religious devotion. For Absalom, it seems to have been a cause for pride.

Verse 27: **“There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a beautiful woman.”** We will find out later that all three sons died, apparently before reaching adulthood. His daughter was named after Absalom’s sister. This Tamar is also beautiful like her aunt was. But notice that all of the descriptions of these immediate family members pertain to physical attributes and not to inward character.

In vv. 28-30 we read, **“So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. Then he said to his servants, ‘See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.’ So Absalom's servants set the field on fire.”**

We can sympathize with Absalom’s desire to have some kind of relationship with his father. Yet we also find evidence of a rebellious character in him. Joab had helped to arrange Absalom’s return to

Jerusalem. Now Absalom is having his field destroyed just to get his attention. Notice also that Absalom has his own set of servants.

Verses 31-32: **“Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, ‘Why have your servants set my field on fire?’ Absalom answered Joab, ‘Behold, I sent word to you, “Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, ‘Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.’” Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.’”** We are not told why Joab delayed his response. There are many possible reasons.

We can appreciate Absalom’s desire to find out exactly where he stands with his father. His words are similar to what David said to his friend Jonathan in 1 Samuel #20 v. 8. (1 SAMUEL 20:8) There David said to his friend, **“But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?”** What Absalom’s real motive is in meeting with his father is unclear. We can certainly understand the part of the picture where he needs to find out what his status is in the royal family. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Each of these two men seems to recognize the guilt in the other. But each is hesitant to extend mercy and forgiveness. David is caught between the responsibility to be just and to be merciful. He accepted his son’s status as an exile, but he did not require his death. Most of us can understand this basic tension between justice and mercy in our roles as parents, teachers, bosses, and leaders. It is often difficult to find the right balance between promoting justice and exercising mercy, between exercising discipline and giving grace.

Finally, v. 33: **“Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.”** Thus we appear to have some measure of reconciliation.

David was the father and the king. He should have taken the lead in all of this, but he did not. If David was not going to punish or exercise some kind of discipline, then he needed to forgive Absalom. His hesitation and failure to do anything only added to Absalom’s resentment.

III.

We come then to THE LESSON ABOUT RESENTMENT. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE LESSON ABOUT RESENTMENT) Life is filled with injustice. There are no perfect parents or perfect kids or perfect bosses

or perfect teachers or perfect friends or perfect church people or perfect governments. There are always things that we can find that can make us angry.

Some injustices should make us angry. There is such a thing as righteous anger. Jesus exhibited that when He cleaned out the money changers and merchants from the temple in Jerusalem. But we need to handle anger in the right way. In Ephesians #4 vv. 26 & 27 (EPHESIANS 4:26-27) the Apostle Paul writes, **“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”** Festering anger leads to resentment. Resentment turned inward leads to depression. Turned outward, it leads to harm toward other people.

A.

There are at least a couple of takeaways that we can get from this story about resentment. The first is THE NEED FOR CONFESSION. (III. THE LESSON... A. THE NEED FOR CONFESSION) Absalom had a right to be angry about the treatment of his sister Tamar by Amnon and by the inaction of his father. Absalom should have gone to his father about it. It doesn't appear that he did that. His anger festered into resentment which led to the killing of Amnon. It was not his place to take this action.

Absalom was guilty of wrongdoing. He should have confessed his sin to God and to his father. It does not appear that he did that.

David did not handle his responsibility in this matter well, either. He should have exercised some kind of punishment or discipline toward Absalom for what he did. David needed to ask forgiveness and confess his wrongdoing to Tamar and to her brother. We see signs of general confession of wrongdoing from David in the Psalms. But Tamar and Absalom needed to hear it directly from him.

We need to have sensitivity to the fact that people might have anger and resentment toward us for things that we have done or have not done. Confession to them may be in order. The Bible makes clear that we who follow God need to be sensitive to sins that we have committed against Him. In 1 John #1 v. 9 (1 JOHN 1:9) we are given the simple remedy. The Apostle John writes, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** Confession always starts with acknowledging our sins to God.

B.

The other lesson coming out of this passage has to do with THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS. (III. A. B. THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS) The term for forgiveness used most often in the New Testament means literally “to let it go.” That is the nature of Biblical forgiveness. That is what Absalom needed to do. His inability to let his anger and the cause of his anger go will lead to the destruction of others and to himself.

David also was guilty of incomplete forgiveness toward Absalom. His failure to truly forgive Absalom only cultivated his son’s anger and resentment. David had received great forgiveness in his horrible sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, but he could not appear to exercise that kind of forgiveness toward Absalom.

The best example that we have of such great forgiveness is, of course, in Jesus. Though He was the sinless Son of God, He died in our place so that our sins might be forgiven. So it is that we are to forgive others. So it is that this responsibility is included in the Lord’s Prayer.

The period of history in Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1998 is often referred to as “The Troubles.” It was a time marked by conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics tended to want Northern Ireland to be connected with the Republic of Ireland, which is mostly Catholic. Protestants, who comprised the majority of the population of Northern Ireland, wanted to remain a part of the United Kingdom.

The Irish Republican Army was involved in acts of terrorism toward Protestants and toward the government of the UK and Northern Ireland. Protestant radicals responded with acts of violence toward the Catholics. In 1987 an IRA bomb went off in a small town west of Belfast amid a group of Protestants who had gathered to honor the war dead. Eleven people died and 64 were wounded.

Gordon Wilson, a devout Methodist, was buried in the wreckage with his twenty-year-old daughter. **“Daddy, I love you very much,”** were her last words, as she held her father’s hand and waited for rescuers. She died a few hours later in the hospital.

From his hospital bed Gordon Wilson told a reporter, **“I have lost my daughter, but I bear no grudge. Bitter talk is not going to bring Marie Wilson back to life. I shall pray, tonight and every night, that**

God will forgive them.” Wilson had similar words of forgiveness in a BBC radio interview that same week. Historian Jonathan Bardon later observed, **“No words in more than twenty-five years of violence in Northern Ireland had such a powerful, emotional impact.”**

After his release from the hospital, Gordon Wilson embarked on a crusade to achieve Protestant-Catholic reconciliation. Protestant extremists had planned to avenge the bombing, but they decided that the publicity surrounding Wilson made such a plan politically unwise. Wilson wrote a book about his daughter and constantly repeated the refrain, **“Love is the bottom line.”**

Eventually Wilson met with the IRA leaders and personally forgave them for what they had done. He asked them to lay down their arms. **“I know that you’ve lost loved ones, just like me,”** he told them. **“Surely, enough is enough. Enough blood has been spilled.”**

The Irish Republic ultimately made Wilson a member of its Senate. When he died in 1995, the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland, and all of Great Britain honored this ordinary Christian who had gained fame for his extraordinary display of forgiveness and work toward reconciliation. His behavior played a part in finally bringing peace to Northern Ireland.

Such is the kind of people whom we should seek to be--- people who are diligent to confess our wrongdoing and people who forgive others, people who are known for their desire to achieve reconciliation. In today’s divided world, these are attributes that are desperately needed.