



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Samuel 3:1-39

“Three Distinguished Men and the Living God”

TRANSCRIPT

Returning to 2 Samuel chapter 3 and reading verses 1 through 39. We had a little discussion about the value of reading Scripture before we came in. It does take a good bit of time to read some of these chapters but, really, in the final analysis, it's more important that we all read the word of God than it is to hear the preaching of the word, if we have to have only one. So we do not want to de-emphasize the reading of the word of God. If I could know or any other expositor could know that we had always read the chapter ahead of time then, of course, it would be nice but reality takes over and we know that that's not true of most of us when we come into a meeting. And, furthermore, some of you who are here are visitors and you may not even know that we are studying David's life.

So, let's read, beginning with verse 1 of 2 Samuel chapter 3.

Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. But David grew stronger and stronger and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; his second, Chileab, by Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur; the fourth, Adonijah the son of

Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, by David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron. Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David that Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul. And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So Ishbosheth said to Abner, “Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?”

Incidentally, the text does not say plainly that he did, but every evidence is that he did from his reaction and from other matters as well.]

“Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, ‘Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman? May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the Lord has sworn to him to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.’ And he could not answer Abner another word because he feared him. Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, ‘Whose is the land?’ saying also, ‘Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you.’ And David said, ‘Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face.’

A very surprising thing that this should hold up, the union of the twelve tribes, something that God had promised to David long ago.

“So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son, saying, ‘Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines.’”

You may remember that was the bargain that Saul made with David; if he should slay a hundred Philistines, he would give Michal for his wife. And David went out and slew two hundred. But he only mentions the hundred because that's the legal bargain that was made.

“And Ishbosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel [or Faltiel] the son of Laish. Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping behind her.

You tend, as you read that, to feel very sorry for him but we'll say a word or two about it later on. Evidently, he was very fond of Michal and she may have been fond of him. They had been married for some years now or they had been living together for some years.

“So Abner said to him, ‘Go, return!’ And he returned. Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, saying, ‘In time past you were seeking for David to be king over you. Now then, do it! For the Lord has spoken of David, saying, ‘By the hand of My servant David, I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and the hand of all their enemies.’” And Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin. [That is, the tribe of Benjamin.] Then Abner also went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and the whole house of Benjamin. So Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. Then Abner said to David, ‘I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires.’ So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

At that moment the servants of David and Joab came from a raid and brought much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he

had gone in peace. [Notice the use of that expression, ‘he had gone in peace,’ twice now.] When Joab and all the troops that were with him had come, they told Joab, saying, ‘Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, and he has gone in peace.’ Then Joab came to the king and said, ‘What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone? Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing.’”

In effect, he accused him of spying. And when Joab had gone from David’s presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it.

“Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother. Afterward, when David heard it, he said, ‘My kingdom and I are guiltless before the Lord forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father’s house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff.’”

And, incidentally, that term is the equivalent of a distaff, and as you know, that would be something that a woman does. She uses the distaff in her work and so, what this really means, is someone in the family who is effeminate, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread. That’s quite a curse.

“So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle. Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, ‘Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner.’ [So, the

King made Joab mourn for the one whom he had murdered.] And King David followed the coffin. [A most touching picture of the compassion of King David.] So they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. And the king sang *a lament* over Abner [This is his second lament, remember the lament over Saul's death.] and said, ‘Should Abner die as a fool dies? [That means something like ‘an ungodly man’ as a rebel. “Should Abner dies as a fool dies?” [And then he speaks directly to Abner as he did, you may remember, speaking to Jonathan in the first lament.] Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put into fetters; As a man falls before wicked men, so you fell.’ Then all the people wept over him again. And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, ‘God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!’”

I think you can understand that this would have been very important to David to be sure that he did not give the impression by his actions that he had, in league with Joab, kill the commander in chief of the armies of the eleven tribes because that would have had a great deal to do with the allegiance that the eleven tribes would ultimately yield to David. It was not his fault, and he wanted to be sure that it was understood that it was not his fault.

“Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, since whatever the king did please all the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's intent to kill Abner the son of Ner. Then the king said to his servants, ‘Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, [Abishai and Joab, Asahel you remember was killed by Abner.] are too harsh for me. The Lord shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness.’”

I was going to say something in the message but it may as well be said here. I think you can see, if you examine David's life very carefully, you can I think see why God called him “A man after his own heart in spite of his many sins.” Because underlying everything is a commitment to the Lord God, himself, to his word, the recognition that he is the Living God and fundamentally he has allegiance to Him first of all and to his word.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these passages from the word of God, which speak so marvelously of what Thou hast been doing down through the centuries in the accomplishment of Thy purposes. And we thank Thee for the great purpose which, ultimately, leads to the enthronement of David's Greater Son, the Lord and Savior, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who has purchased us from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation and shall make us kings and priest forever, that we may rule and reign with him over the earth.

We ask Thy blessing upon the whole Church, upon Believers Chapel, and we pray, particularly, for those who have requested our prayers. Some who are sick, some who are suffering, some who are bereaving the loss of loved ones, and we remember each one of them, Lord, who have requested our prayers. We pray that Thou wilt answer their petitions in ways that are pleasing to Thee. Give strength, encouragement, consolation, and wisdom to those who minister to them. We ask, Lord, thy blessing upon us in this meeting. May the Lord Jesus Christ be exalted within it.

And we pray in His name. Amen.

[Message] I know it's nice to be able to relax. You've had your mouths open for a lengthy period of time. [Laughter] And, if I were close enough, I might tell you whether you needed to go to the dentist or not, but I am fortunately not that close. [More laughter]

Some of you sang that very interestingly. Some of you sang, “Gloooooorrrr” and others of you are rather stiff, like I am, and just try to keep your heads still. We sang that last night, as I remember, so we have been singing it a good bit over the past 24 hours.

Well, the subject for today as we continue our studies in the Life of David is “Three Distinguished Men and the Living God.” The events of David’s life are, obviously, important to the Holy Spirit, who is the ultimate author of Scripture. Of course, because of the great amount of space devoted to David and his life, in 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel and then the books of Chronicles as well, but it’s also important because the messianic hope is located in the house of David. And so we are being introduced to David and we are being taught a number of things about David. And, ultimately, lying behind him is his Greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the theme of David and the promises to him will be significant throughout the rest of the word of God. So we’re not surprised then for the amount of time that is devoted to the life of David.

Now, he has now become king of Judah; but not yet of all Israel. As a matter of fact, king over one tribe only and he is in Hebron making his home there at the present time. These years, these early years, spent in Hebron are years of patient waiting, also an indication of the faith that David has in the promises of the word of God, growing strength as we shall see, and growing strength in the sense of a larger following in his kingdom. And also years in which he expresses his nature in generous words with reference to others who appear in the account, such as his generous words for Saul who was, really, one who sought his life constantly. And then for Abner, who fought against him, and also was an enemy. But, in spite of that, he recognizes the things that can be said and properly said as good in the lives of Saul and Abner and others.

As a matter of fact, one of the words that David writes in his psalms, in Psalm 27 in verse 14, is a word that illustrates what he is doing right now. He exhorts us in the 27th Psalm to “Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, wait,

I say, on the Lord.” That characterizes David in Hebron. He was waiting upon God to fulfill the promises that had been given to him.

Now, as you look at this man, as I mentioned in the Scripture reading, there are things about David, of course, that appear to be contrary to the precepts of the word of God. So not everything is sweet and lovely in the life of this elected one. There is the curse of the harem which he is gathering about himself, many wives. And as we shall see in David’s life that is a deadly element that looks to the future woe that he will experience from time to time, because in this respect he was not in harmony with the word of God.

It has always raised a question among New Testament believers, how is it that we have such words in the New Testament, by our Lord and others, that we are to marry and we are not to divorce, we are to stay with the wife of our youth as long as we are alive, the two of us? And so, how can we justify the strong words that Jesus says about marriage in the light of the fact that so many in the Old Testament gathered to themselves many wives? And, of course, David’s son Solomon followed his father’s example. Well, it illustrates the fact that God tolerated the evil; although he did not approve of the evil.

Now, we have specific word concerning this in Deuteronomy chapter 17 when Moses writes about the king in Israel who would come. He says some words specifically about this. He says about the king, “But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” Well, these wives became, in one sense, David’s besetting sin.

Three men dominate the chapter. There is Abner, who is Saul’s cousin, a prince and a great man, David calls him. But he was a man consumed by one master passion, and that master passion was the love of preeminence. To have preeminence was the great love of Abner the cousin of Saul. In fact, he is, someone has suggested, an illustration of the principle, “It’s better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.” And he

would like to reign in the earth and have power in the earth; but he forgets his obligation to heaven, itself. What is, in once sense, so bad about Abner is that he does what some have sought to do and which we often seek to do, and that is to use spiritual things as a means for position and material benefits.

Someone has said, “Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul, but God strengthened David.” But Abner knew that David was to be the king. No man ever heard Abner utter a godly thing until now, it has been said. Nor has he been so at this time, a godly man. And the thing that caused him to turn to David was not something that could be called some guidance from the Holy Spirit for him; it was, rather, he wanted to have revenge on Ishbosheth for the fact that Ishbosheth had called into question his relationship to Rizpah. And, in a sense, if you think about that for a moment, I think you will see it is certainly a very odious thing for Abner to make spiritual things a stalking horse for the policy that he is seeking to further. In other words, he now uses the relationship to David and the promises that God had given regarding him in order to advance himself. Use religion, use spiritual things for his own benefit. So, Abner.

Joab, the second of the individuals in the chapter, was David’s nephew, a violent, wily, unscrupulous man who will appear throughout the story of David, and finally is ultimately slain himself. And then David, God’s chosen king.

Let me say first a few words about David and the years in Hebron. The war between the northern tribes, or the eleven, and Judah, the southern tribe, was necessary because of the conflicting natures and aims of the contending parties. Ishbosheth, as Saul, sought to have authority over all of the tribes. David also was looking forward to the accomplishment of the purposes of God. And those promises, incidentally, that had been given to David were well known, as we see. And, consequently, that was one of the grounds and reasons for the conflicts.

And the growing family is grounds for further strengthening of himself. If you look at the individuals that he married, and if we knew all of the details of them, the

chances are that we'd see that many of them were very, very useful for political purposes. For example, we read of Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur. So, by his marriages, David was making relationships, which would ultimately strengthen his own kingdom. It's not said that he did it for that purpose but, nevertheless, we read in the midst of the war, the house of David grew stronger and stronger and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. But these things that were political strength were also the seeds of later trials and sins that King David was forced to undergo.

The men that you have under you, however, do not always follow the leader. Fashion, someone has said, cannot make righteousness. And so, consequently, David is gathering around him individuals who will not be, necessarily, the kinds of men that David was. And so, the people that we gather around ourselves, or in our day, we are not kings, but the people around whom we gather are frequently the reasons for some of our failures, our failure to gather the right people around us, or our failure to gather around the right people.

And so, consequently, modern Christians should carefully think through the individuals with whom they have their Christian fellowship, or their fellowship for that matter. That's why the Scriptures speak so strongly about believers fellowshiping with believers, for the influence is great, and when believers do not fellowship with believers, I'm not saying that we should fellowship only with them because we should be evangelistic in our friendships as we have opportunity. But, fundamentally, our relationship is to the Body of Christ. And, in our relationship to the Body of Christ we will be strengthened as over against a relationship with the ungodly, and I mean in the biblical sense, the unbelievers, we will suffer as a result of it.

Our society around us is constantly pelting us with things that are contrary to the word of God and so, in this age of Madonna, it's not surprising that individuals, particularly our young people who have to look at things that are constantly a threat to their spiritual lives, are drifting often away from the word of God. To my mind, Madonna

and her ilk, are contemptible. And it's surprising and startling and really terrible that our society is exposed to this over and over again and, as a matter of fact, seems to think there is really nothing seriously wrong with it. So, sodomy, masochism, lesbianism, homosexuality, all of the other things presented to us as if they were normal; and so it is not surprising that we are having trials and troubles in the Christian world, as well.

Now, in the midst of the things in Israel, Abner makes what apparently is a mistake. He goes in to one of the wives of King Saul. There is some justification for that being an attempt to take over the individual who has died. I don't have time to turn to passages that underline that fact, but it was regarded in ancient times as an assumption of right. And since Saul had been the king, to go in to Rizpah was an attempt, perhaps, to claim authority for Abner. Well, Ishbosheth, Saul's only remaining son, was a very weak man. But he did charge him with guilt on that point. And Abner replies in anger, lost his temper, “Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah?” And then, in order to respond effectively, power wise, he reveals that all along he has known it was God's will for David to be king. Isn't that interesting? So, he says, “Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, and to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman? May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the Lord has sworn to him.”

Can you imagine that? “As the Lord has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah from Dan to Beersheba.” In other words, Ishbosheth's charge, that you have gone to Rizpah, is the occasion of the drawing back of the veil of what was really in the heart of Abner, the knowledge of God's promise to David. It's very interesting because here is a man who has been living as if he didn't know about that, but now this brings out, removes the veil over his real thoughts. Both men are in rebellion. Ishbosheth is in rebellion seeking to

be king rather than David and now Abner as well. Men are strange compounds of light and darkness. How true that is.

Here is an individual who is knowledgeable of the promises of God but seeking to gain power for himself. And when thwarted, he acknowledges that he knows those promises and now, under the cover of religion or spiritual things, he will go to David and say, I want to give the kingdom to you.

You can see this so often in human nature. You have an individual who is indignant over the fact that one of his friends hasn't repaid a twenty dollar debt, and all the time, as an unbelieving man, he's robbed God, robbing God of the submission and obedience that is due to the Lord God. We can get so indignant over a little thing and forget the important thing; and the important thing for Abner was submission to the promises of God.

Well, Abner, then, a strong man, and many things about him good, as David will say, he was a great man, now he determines to go to David and to work out an agreement with him, hoping perhaps it would appear that he would be appointed the commander-in-chief of the armies of the twelve tribes.

Joab, however, was the commander-in-chief of David's army and so there is, obviously, circumstances of conflict. In fact, this kind of feeling that is at work here that leads to rivalry is the social form of what has been called, self-ism, but really it's more than self-ism, it's the unbelief that leads to the selfishness that characterizes us.

But, at any rate, he sends messengers to David. And like anybody negotiating for position, he leads off with his best shot, which is “Whose is the land?” That's very interesting. It's like if Saddam Hussein and Bush ever sit down, and their representatives, one is going to lead off with a shot. Well, Abner's shot is, “Whose is the land?” He knows, now, that God has promised the land to David. And, no doubt, he would say, David, I know you've been promised the land but I have eleven tribes. And I have the land where the eleven tribes live. And you have the land where the tribe of Judah lives.

So whose is the land? Let's negotiate. And so, that's the way he starts out. “Whose is the land?” “Make your covenant with me and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you.”

Now, what would you do if you had been David? Well, you'd try, of course, to make some kind of arrangement with Abner that would give you all of the kingdom. So you might say something to him that might please him, offer him commander-in-chief of the armed forces, that's what he wanted evidently, let him be your right hand man, but then the whole thing is yours. God has promised it and now circumstances are leading toward it, it would appear. It looks as if everything is in order. So I'll give him what he wants because I'll get what God has promised to me.

It's very interesting. I'm sure you'd give in a little bit, wouldn't you? Well, look at what David does. He says, okay, I'll make a covenant with you. But, first of all, before anything, bring Michal. What an interesting thing? A personal affair, a little personal affair. First, bring Michal. Michal? He hasn't been with Michal for years, but again, there is that sense of justice that is ingrained in the character of David. She was taken from him. She is his wife. In the sight of God, Michal is his wife. And so and, furthermore, it's a just claim that he has. She's bought and bound to his heart, he loved her. And she, evidently, at one time at least, loves him. They had memorable times as husband and wife. David has regard for what is right. And it was just. There is nothing about it that was unjust. He has an absolute right to Michal. But to make the affairs of state to depend upon something so insignificant as regaining another wife, when he's already got a harem. But that's an insight into the character of the man who tries his best, fails from time to time, to follow the word of God.

This right is founded upon justice, it represents a reverential attitude toward the law of God. Remember, the law of God never supported a harem, or polygamy. It's incited by affection, adapted to test the sincerity and fidelity of Abner. It was a little bit of

a test. It had one political side to it, consistent with David's honor. He's going to be the king, but his wife is living with someone else, taken from him. That won't look good.

Calculated to remind the northern tribes of his former service against the Philistines, reminding them that he's the one who delivered them from Goliath, and then, to increase his own influence in the north, she's Saul's daughter, and there's a link with the kingdom of Saul. It was a wise thing but, fundamentally, it was right in the sight of the law of God.

So, first bring Michal. The great affairs of the nation rest on, ultimately, divine principles and the divine principles of husband, wife, family; husband, wife, family. It's amazing. It gives you an insight into David. I think I can see some indication why David is a man after my own heart. Amid all of his failures, there's that fundamental conviction and committal to the Lord God.

So, Ishbosheth gives her. Paltiel comes along, following after her, weeping. And so all of who are Christians, we get a tear or so in our eye and say, my, isn't that terrible. Why break up their relationship? Why break up their relationship? He, obviously, has high affection for her. She probably has affection for him. They've lived together for a good while. I confess, his tears do not move me to pity. We say "caveat emptor," let the buyer beware. But *caveat raptor* is also a truth of God. Let the one who takes or seizes aware to. And Paltiel fell in with Saul and when Saul took Michal away. He took Michal. It was a mistake on his part. He was wrong in doing that. And now, he suffers the consequences of it. So his tears, which were tears because he's losing Michal, ought to be tears of repentance for his sin against God and his sin against David. So don't feel compassionate towards Paltiel, because in so doing, you fail to understand some things that are far more important than tears and sweet feelings, sentiment.

Now, the final part of the chapter has to do with Joab and the murder of Abner. And the details we've read about. I won't take the time to go over them again but when Joab finds out that Abner has been there, while he was gone, he comes in to David and

says, “What have you done. Abner is just here to spy us out.” And then, remembering of course, that Abner is the one who slew his brother in self defense, whether the laws of kinsman-redeemer, which had to do with homicide, are applicable in a battle is a moot question. But at any rate, possibly he had the right to do it. But, nevertheless, it was, David thought wrong and probably was wrong, ultimately, in the light of all of the information. But there are one or two things that make it impossible to speak in dogmatism about it. But, at any rate, as you know, he took Abner’s aside and then took his dagger out and stuck it under the fifth rib.

This morning, Dr. Howard, who is a surgeon, turned to me and said, is that reading “under the fifth rib” correct? And I said, well, I think so. He said, well, that’s into the heart. One of the great benefits of having a surgeon on the platform, making announcements. [Laughter] At any rate, he stuck it in his heart and he died on the spot and I guess you can understand why.

Now, I could see the headlines now, in the newspaper. Hebron Today! Abner Slain! Spread all across in big letters. Abner Slain! The act of the wily Joab, the villainous treachery of mind contrary to his own king’s sentiment.

So we learn some other principles and that is, the Lord has a difficult time. Even with his own ministers, the apostles, they failed to live up to the principles of our Lord. Kings cannot make ministers, even godly kings like David, they had to work with what they had and they don’t have much. Seldom do successors in the Lord’s work ever measure up to those who were the ones upon whom the Lord put his hand and did work. Seldom do those, sometimes it is so, but seldom those who follow along have the same sense of the presence of God and the commitment to him that others have. And Joab was certainly a long ways from David.

Now, there is one other important thing here, my Christian friend, and that is this: guilt is sovereign. In other words, when a person disobeys the word of God, immediately God gives the sense of guilt. It’s sovereign. You can not put it off, you cannot push it

aside. It comes, immediately. In fact, the idea that someone can lay guilt on someone else is really wrong. It's not so. You cannot do it because, fundamentally, when a sin is committed, we immediately feel from God the guilt. And we also feel the righteousness of it, of our actions. If we know in an incident that we are right, we don't feel guilt. If we're wrong, we feel guilt. The only advantage that keeping quiet has with reference to guilt is that the time of the revelation of it is put off. But, immediately, we feel guilt when we have sinned.

And I am sure that Joab felt guilt, immediately. And David knew he was innocent immediately. So we find this played out here. When David heard it he said, “My kingdom and I are guiltless before the Lord forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner.” And then, speaking of Joab, for there was no doubt about who had done it. The newspaper had said it. So he said, “Let it rest upon the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, or who is effeminate or who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread.” And so the secrecy of the guilty is no escape from the guilt that God, immediately, dispenses to those who have sinned against him.

It's a very interesting thing, also, to note, that a sacred cause may have supposed supporters who are really not in sympathy with that cause and in this case, we had a professed supporter of it whose actions are a reproach to the cause. Often you have people say with reference to Christianity; Christianity has been guilty of such and such a crime. That may be true. And it is true in many instances. But, it's not Christianity. It's a Christian, or in many cases it's not a Christian, it's a professed Christian. And we should remember, it's true, that Christians do not always support Christianity. But the cause is to be separated from the supporters. The cause, this holy cause in which we are engaged, is a holy cause. If you want to find something wrong with Christianity, find it in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not even in the life and ministry of the apostles, and surely, not in the life and ministry of the disciples down through the years. For we are

sinner! And we fail! We fail constantly. But the holiness and righteousness of the cause, the truth of Christianity is something else. And so, when attempts are made to charge Christianity with the acts of its professed supporters, please remember that. It's very important and here we have an illustration of it.

So David responds by rebuking Joab, giving by divine inspiration an imprecation, and then expressing in a remarkable lament, his sympathy with Abner. “Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put into fetters; As a man falls before wicked men, so you fell.” The thing that he particularly is impressed about is the mode by which Abner died. He died like a criminal, you might expect. But then as he looked at it, he said, no, no. You were not that. You were something different.

The one thing about Abner that is sad, is that Abner, unfortunately, did not understand the nature of man. He was a remarkable man. He'd survived many battles, battles against the Philistines, but one thing he did not do. And that was, he did not realize that Joab was a sinner also. His one mistake was to trust Joab.

Now, this week, you know, I've had a good time reading Calvin and Hobbes. In fact, every morning I look forward not so much to my breakfast, but to see again what Bill Watterson has said in the Calvin column, Calvin and Hobbes, because Calvin is trying to figure out some way whereby he can escape the divine principle that Santa Claus rewards the good and not the bad. Because, fundamentally, deep down within he knows he's not good. So he's trying to figure out how a way, how he can get out of what is obvious. He says, “This whole business of Santa rewarding good kids and neglecting bad kids, really bugs me. Not that I have anything to worry about, of course.” “A paragon of virtue, that's you,” says Hobbes as his eyes turn away. “Right. But see, there are certain things a good kid could do that might look bad in certain light, if one doesn't consider all the mitigating circumstances.” “Like keeping an incontinent toad in your mom's sweater drawer?” [Laughter] He says, “Exactly. If I was being raised in a better environment, I wouldn't do things like that.” [More laughter]

Abner's one mistake is he trusted Joab, evidently. You cannot trust any man, ultimately. We're sinners and bad.

So, let me sum it up. The time is up.

The end of Abner illustrates the importance of simple obedience to God's known will. Rather than doing right for the wrong reason, he did what was right by offering David the kingdom, but for the wrong reason, for personal gain, for personal interest. And verse 9, I think may be adopted by us in relation to our relationship to the Lord's kingdom. And verse 9 says, “May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the Lord has sworn to him.” What a magnificent life verse, if we put our own name in there. “May God do so to Lewis and more also, if I do not do for the son of David, what the Lord has sworn to him.”

And then the end of Joab, the Marlboro, the great British general, the Bellasarius, the great Byzantine military leader of the Jewish empire. Joab illustrates the failure of worldly policy, secular expediency and temporal ambition. Evil deeds are often wrought with plausible pretexts and Joab's evil deed, like so many evil deeds, was wrought or done with plausible pretexts.

And then, of course, the end for waiting David, the one who waits for God to do his work, well, ultimately, the kingdom does come to him and he has the great privilege of standing in the line of the Messiah, and knowing that from his humanity shall come the seed that shall rule and reign over the face of the earth.

The one thing that distinguishes David from other men of this time, and particularly of Abner and Joab, is he believed in the Living God. He believed, really, in the Living God. And, consequently, for him, he waited and persevered, and gave us the advice to wait on the Lord, he will strengthen our hearts, wait indeed on the Lord.

Someone said, in something I read this way, “Say not with the procrastinator, Tomorrow, go thy way for this time. For the Holy Ghost saith, Today. Cross, Cross!” That's the Latin word for tomorrow. “Tomorrow! Tomorrow, is the cry of the raven.”

This is the thing that destroys many. While they are saying, “Cross, cross” suddenly, as Augustine said, “The door is shut. The man that procrastinates struggles ever with ruin. There is a circumscribed space of time appointed thee, which thou dost not employ in making all calm and serene within, it will pass away and thou wilt pass away and it will never return.”

That’s our life, our circumscribed time that God has given to us, each one of us, we have a particular time. It’s not long. It’s short. And we are responsible before the Lord God to give our lives to him and to live those lives under the direction of the one with whom we have to do. May God help us to do that.

If you are here, and you’ve never believed in Christ, we remind you of the good news that Christ has died for sinners and that you may have eternal life. As you come to him and receive as a free gift what Christ has done in shedding his blood for sinners. Eternal life, through faith only, we have nothing else that we can offer to God, we cannot give good works to him that gained for us eternal life, only to receive what we cannot earn, only in that way do we have life. Not by education, not by culture, not by the ordinances, observing the Lord’s Supper, being baptized, joining a church, praying through any of the other things that we tend to want to say, give us life. It’s only through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believe in him and thou shall be saved.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks and praise Thee for the word of God and for the many lessons that appear and especially appear in the life of this great King of Israel, David. May we learn the lessons from his life. Help us, Lord, in that little space of time that Thou hast given us to exist in this world to be in measure at least faithful to Thee and Thy word.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.