



Studies in the Life of David

Text

Second Samuel 18:19-19:8

Topic

Two messengers come to David bearing what he will consider the bad news that his son was killed in the battle

Title

"The Bad News Bearers"

Introduction

Experts say there is a decline in the American work ethic. It's showing up more-and-more in younger workers.

According to one survey, with over 50,000 respondents, "young people are a self-admitted group of huge slackers."¹

Workers in their 20's are nearly 5 times more likely than workers in their 50's to describe their efforts as "only the minimum." Older workers, on the other hand, are 40% more likely to work "really hard."

I would hope that if these surveys were taken among believers in Jesus Christ that 100% of the respondents in every age group would say they are not just likely to work "really hard" but are actually doing so because they are doing it for the Lord. We read in Colossians 3:23-24,

Colossians 3:23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,
Colossians 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

¹ <http://www.tableausoftware.com/blog/age-marriage-work-ethic>

The “whatever you do” in that passage includes marriage, family, and church as well as your work.

Since we ought to be working really hard, “as to the Lord,” and since we are going to stand before the Lord and “receive the reward,” it might be a good idea to take a look at our work ethic on a regular basis.

Our passage in Second Samuel describes how King David received and then reacted to the news that his traitorous son, Absalom, had been killed. As we see it unfold we will be able to assess the performance of the messengers as messengers and analyze David’s reaction in terms of his responsibilities as king.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Should Assess Your Performance In Whatever Tasks God Has Entrusted To You, and #2 You Should Analyze Your Submission In Whatever Callings God Has Entrusted To You.

#1 You Should Assess Your Performance
In Whatever Tasks God Has Entrusted To You
(18:19-32)

We’re obviously in the middle of a longer story. Absalom had attacked David’s forces and lost. While retreating on his mule through the thick forrest he had gotten caught in a tree. David’s general, Joab, thrust Absalom through with spears, had his ten attendants hack away at him, then they buried Absalom under a pile of stones.

It ended the hostilities. How to tell King David that the battle was over but his son was dead was the next order of business.

2 Samuel 18:19 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Let me run now and take the news to the king, how the Lord has avenged him of his enemies."

2 Samuel 18:20 And Joab said to him, "You shall not take the news this day, for you shall take the news another day. But today you shall take no news, because the king's son is dead."

Why not send Ahimaaz? “Because the king’s son is dead” was the message, Joab probably had two things in mind:

1. This is the kind of news that could get you killed if a king was in the wrong frame of mind. You know that old saying, “don’t kill the messenger”? *A lot of times they did kill him!*
2. Maybe Joab knew that Ahimaaz would be unable to deliver the message in its entirety. In fact, when Ahimaaz does have the opportunity to tell David, he withholds the truth about Absalom.

One of the first things to assess about our serving the Lord at home, or at work, or at church, or in the world, is that it is up to Him to assign us our various tasks. We set ourselves up for failure when we insist on doing something God is not calling us to while leaving things He has called us to undone.

2 Samuel 18:21 Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." So the Cushite bowed himself to Joab and ran.

In the Cushite we see several qualities.

1. We see humility in the very fact he was not named. It reminds us to be task-oriented and not worry about recognition.
2. He was immediately available. As a messenger he understood he might be called upon at any moment. So with us we should have a sense God wants to use us right where we are and should be ready.
3. He was submissive in that he asked no questions and “bowed himself to Joab.”
4. Perhaps most of all, he was willing to lay down his life in the performance of the task. As we said, this was the kind of news that could get you killed.

You and I have news - the good news, the Gospel - to deliver. It can literally get us killed. More likely here in the United States it just ‘kills’ opportunities for popularity and advancement.

Still, we are to humble ourselves, be available to the Lord, and bow to His leading.

2 Samuel 18:22 And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "But whatever happens, please let me also run after the Cushite." So Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, since you have no news ready?"

“No news ready” seems to mean that he had nothing to add to what the Cushite would say. There’s no use duplicating effort.

This is actually a very important realization. There is far too much duplication of effort by Christians, especially in the church.

K.P. Yohannan, founder of Gospel for Asia, says that while Christians are busy mumbling to themselves about things we already know, most of the world has never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He means we have a tendency to become ingrown. We keep establishing ministries among ourselves, duplicating what we are already doing, when we could and should be establishing work out in the world we’ve been sent to reach for Christ.

When I was first asked to come to Hanford to pastor Calvary Hanford it took some real convincing that there was not a similar church the folks could attend. There’s no use doing something that is already being done.

2 Samuel 18:23 "But whatever happens," he said, "let me run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain, and outran the Cushite.

Ahimaaz insisted. Zeal to serve the Lord is to be commended, but it must be tempered by obedience. Just because I want to do something is no indication I ought to.

Joab let him go. We can’t be sure why. Maybe he thought the Cushite had an adequate head start and by the time Ahimaaz arrived there would be nothing to tell.

I’ll tell you one thing. It’s hard to say “No” sometimes, especially to a persistent person. Still it’s better to say “No” if you are convinced that “No” is the answer.

Aren't you always amazed when you see clips from *American Idol* of people who think they have talent but are awful? Then they are genuinely hurt when told they have no talent. Somewhere along the way family and friends have said "Yes" to them when they should have said "No."

Ahimaaz outran the Cushite because he knew a short-cut. Was that good? Was that to be commended? In light of the fact that Ahimaaz will fail to properly deliver the message, taking the short-cut was *not* a good idea.

The obvious application for us in whatsoever we do for the Lord, wherever we do it, is to *not* take short-cuts! This could apply to our personal, devotional lives. There are no short-cuts to deepening our walk with God. We must spend the time alone with Him. Getting ahead, pushing our way forward, is not a substitute for personal discipline.

The no short-cut principle also applies to our activities for the Lord. Do things right, thoughtfully, and finish what you start. You know, anyone can start off strong. It's finishing that counts.

2 Samuel 18:24 Now David was sitting between the two gates. And the watchman went up to the roof over the gate, to the wall, lifted his eyes and looked, and there was a man, running alone.

2 Samuel 18:25 Then the watchman cried out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he came rapidly and drew near.

2 Samuel 18:26 Then the watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, "There is another man, running alone!" And the king said, "He also brings news."

A lone runner was a good sign. For one thing it meant that the army was not retreating.

A second runner would indicate that there was additional news. In other words, something had significantly changed since the first runner was dispatched, something important. It was really a little confusing to see two messengers.

I think sometimes it can be better to support the first messenger rather than send another with the same news. We see this sometimes on the mission field. Look for someone to support who is already doing the work, already

delivering the Gospel message, rather than establish something new. If there is a real need, and a genuine leading, then go for it. But you don't need to be in the same place doing the same thing.

2 Samuel 18:27 So the watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man, and comes with good news."

2 Samuel 18:28 So Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, "All is well!" Then he bowed down with his face to the earth before the king, and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king!"

2 Samuel 18:29 The king said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant and me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what it was about."

2 Samuel 18:30 And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still.

Maybe Joab initially said "No" to Ahimaaz because he knew David would interpret it as a sign that Absalom was alive and well. He didn't want to give David a false hope then deliver the news.

When Ahimaaz was finally called upon to deliver the message, *he blew it!* He couldn't bring himself to tell the king that Absalom was dead.

2 Samuel 18:31 Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "There is good news, my lord the king! For the Lord has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you."

2 Samuel 18:32 And the king said to the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" So the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm, be like that young man!"

Nice job! I can't imagine a more concise, a more accurate, a more compassionate way to have delivered the message.

Do you regularly assess your performance in the tasks God has given you? You should; I should. We should have a strong work ethic at home, in the church, at work, and out in the world.

In fact, it's good for us that everyone else's work ethic is declining because it gives us greater opportunity to show the difference Jesus Christ makes in a person's life.

#2 You Should Analyze Your Submission
In Whatever Callings God Has Entrusted To You
(18:33-19:8)

Next we have the aftermath of the news upon David. His son was dead. Regardless that Absalom had murdered his half-brother, Amnon; that he had rebelled against David and declared himself king; that in the ensuing conflict 20,000 Israelites had been needlessly killed. David loved him as a father and reacted to the news he had lost his son.

2 Samuel 18:33 Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: "O my son Absalom - my son, my son Absalom - if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!"

What father would not rather die in place of his child? Part of us cannot fault David for his reaction. We still love our children when they are disobedient, when they rebel against our leading. When they cause trouble we hang in there with them. We can certainly understand David's heart as a father.

Ah, but David was more than a father. He was the king. He had a responsibility beyond being a father to his children, and that was to be a shepherd to God's people. He did not have the luxury of ignoring his responsibilities as king to indulge his grief as a father.

Does that sound harsh? Maybe, but it's true. We expect our leaders, people in positions of authority, to act responsibly and appropriately. We expect them to put aside their own feelings, their own grief or anger, and comfort us. I remember after 9/11 looking forward to what our president would say to give comfort and hope to our nation. It was his job, his responsibility.

2 Samuel 19:1 And Joab was told, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom."

2 Samuel 19:2 So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. For the people heard it said that day, "The king is grieved for his son."

2 Samuel 19:3 And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.

2 Samuel 19:4 But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

David's reaction was turning victory into defeat. His subjects felt "ashamed" rather than encouraged.

Joab took it upon himself to confront David.

2 Samuel 19:5 Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines,

2 Samuel 19:6 in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well.

2 Samuel 19:7 Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the Lord, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now."

As David's general the people were looking to Joab to act and he did. I guess if you are going to tell someone to live up to their responsibilities then you need to be doing it yourself.

Have you heard the phrase, 'Cowboy up'? Cowboy up wasn't much known outside of rodeo circles until 2003 when it became the rallying cry for the Boston Red Sox thanks to the players Kevin Millar and Mike Timlin - both Texans. Millar and Timlin injected this bit of rodeo slang into Red Sox lore to fire up the team and its fans. As one t-shirt of the time put it, "Are You Gonna Cowboy Up or Just Lay There and Bleed?"

'Man up' is another expression that's used to exhort you to step-up and do what you are supposed to be doing.

Joab told David to cowboy up, to man up. He told him to act like the king regardless his personal feelings of grief or loss.

As I indicated, we expect our leaders to man up. What we need to do is apply that same thinking to ourselves.

God gives tasks but He also has callings for our lives. Being a husband or a wife is a calling. So is being a parent or a child. So is being an employee or an employer. There are callings to ministry within the church. I think you get the idea.

So if I am called to be a husband and father I need to man up and act like it no matter what I might be feeling otherwise. I need to understand that with the calling comes responsibility.

More than that, with the calling comes the ability through the indwelling Holy Spirit to humble myself and serve the Lord in my calling.

We all, at some time or another, need a talking to like the one Joab gave to David. We let our feelings get in the way. It doesn't matter which feelings. It could be grief, but it's more likely anger or discouragement or disappointment. We may feel 'trapped' or inhibited. No matter the feelings we cannot allow ourselves to surrender to them - no matter how natural it may feel.

We are, after all, supernatural, being prepped for eternity. We need to, and are empowered to, act the way God describes us in the Bible in every one of our callings.

It's a matter of submission to God. He knows what's going on in our homes or at work or in the church or out in the world at large. We need to look to Him, in submission to His will, and act like the men and women of God that we are.

David reacted to Joab's exhortation:

2 Samuel 19:8 Then the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, "There is the king, sitting in the gate." So all the people came before the king. For everyone of Israel had fled to his tent.

Just like that things were put right. It may not happen as quickly for you as it did for David, but you nevertheless are being encouraged to walk in the Spirit in your various callings. Live up to your responsibilities, depending always upon God's empowering.

In First Corinthians 16:13 you read,

1 Corinthians 16:13 (NASB) Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, **act like men**, be strong.

“Act like men,” or as we like to call our Men's Ministry, *Act Like a Man*, a Christian man. Or a woman... or a child... or an employee... or an employer. You get the idea.

Man up and you will find that the message of the Gospel you are sent to deliver will be better received, better understood, by those you've been sent to affect for good and for God.

