



Studies in the Life of David

Text

Second Samuel 3:22-39

Topic

Abner comes offering King David peace but is stabbed and killed by Joab

Title

“Taking a Stab at Peace”

Introduction

A pastor of a church in Manchester, England was preaching on hypocrites in the church when things became hostile.

A number of persons in the congregation began thinking that the words of the sermon were being directed at them.

According to the news report, “some jaw-dropping allegations were then thrown back and forth as a group of irate church-goers... verbally challenged the pastor.”

Among these allegations were questions about the pastor's sexuality to which he reportedly responded by claiming that at least three of the women from the group with which he was arguing were cheating on their husbands with younger men.

When *The Weekend Star* newspaper contacted the pastor, he admitted that the incident indeed occurred. The pastor explained that he was simply doing God's work and would not let evil people get the better of him.

It's funny... But it shouldn't be. As Christians we are called upon to “endeavor... to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians

4:3). We're promised, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

There are lots of reasons we can't all just get along. One has to do with what we might call our **vision**.

- Sometimes we have a kind of spiritual tunnel vision in which we focus mainly on ourselves.
- We ought to have spiritual peripheral vision in which we focus mainly on others and on the effects of our behavior on their appreciation of Jesus.

We're going to encounter men in our text with each kind of vision:

1. The first is Joab. He definitely suffers from tunnel vision and ends up seriously disturbing the peace by killing Abner.
2. The second is David. He has the peripheral vision to see beyond the faults of men like Abner and Joab in order to keep the peace for the benefit of his people and those looking on the nation.

I'll organize my thoughts about spiritual vision around two points: #1 All You See Is Yourself When You Choose To Break Peace, and #2 All You Seek Is The Lord When You Choose To Make Peace.

#1 All You See Is Yourself
When You Choose To Break Peace
(v22-27)

Abner was slimy. He knew that God had anointed David to be king after Saul. But when Saul died Abner took it upon himself to set-up one of Saul's lesser sons, Ishbosheth, as a rival to David's claim to the throne. Then he instigated a conflict with David's general, Joab, which led to civil war. When it looked like David was going to eventually defeat Ishbosheth, Abner decided to defect and offer David his help to unify the kingdom.

David received Abner and accepted his offer of peace. Abner enjoyed a highly-publicized state dinner promoting the peace and was on his way home as we pick up the story.

2 Samuel 3:22 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.

2 Samuel 3:23 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."

There was bad blood between Abner and Joab. Joab's brother, Asael, had pursued Abner in a skirmish between the armies and Abner had killed him.

2 Samuel 3:24 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?"

2 Samuel 3:25 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."

We'll talk about David and his decision in a moment under our second point. For now we're focusing on Joab. His analysis of Abner's offer was that it was a deception. Maybe it was; we'll never know. What we will know from the next few verses is that Joab was out to kill Abner no matter what.

2 Samuel 3:26 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.

2 Samuel 3:27 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.

Note the phrasing, "for the blood of Asahel." It tells us that Joab believed he was acting as the avenger of blood in the death of his brother.

In ancient Israel if you killed someone, whether it was accidental or premeditated, a member of the deceased's family would come after you to kill you. It was an eye-for-an-eye sort of thing. That person was called the avenger of blood.

Were people killing each other left and right? No. Strategically placed throughout Israel there were certain cities designated as cities of refuge. When you killed someone you could flee for your life to the nearest city of refuge. There you were guaranteed refuge from the avenger of blood until

the elders of the city could determine whether the killing had been a case of manslaughter or of murder. Then you were dealt with appropriately.

Was Joab the avenger of the blood of Asahel? No. Asahel had died in battle. Not only that, if you remember the story, Abner twice warned Asahel to quit pursuing him or he'd be forced to kill him.

On top of that, *Hebron was a city of refuge*. Abner was a slime but it was just wrong for Joab to kill him, and doubly wrong to do it in Hebron.

Regardless that Abner might not be the most honorable of men, he came to David with an offer of peace. Joab attacked the peace offer with arguments about Abner's character but his real motivation was that he could only see his own desire for vengeance. All he saw was himself avenging the death of his brother.

He had the tunnel vision we're talking about. Joab refused to see the bigger picture. There was a long civil war. Things were going David's way but there were casualties. How many more brothers would lose brothers? Yet Joab was willing to ignore the establishing of peace by killing Abner.

How would the northern tribes react to the murder of their general who had come under a banner of truce offering peace? How would it make David look?

This kind of tunnel vision that sees only self is why peace is so often broken. Whether it's at home or the workplace or school or church, you will be wronged by someone. You'll be snubbed. You'll be ignored or overlooked or mistreated. *You fill in the offense!*

It's right then when you decide if you're going to act as a peacemaker or not.

Let's take a step back and talk about peace. Like it or not, the Bible says that you are God's enemy until you are saved.

Colossians 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works...

Every human being is born into this world the enemy of God. It's because of sin. Sin is imputed to you; it is inherited by you; and it is individually committed by you.

You need to be reconciled to God... **And you can be!**

Colossians 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, **yet now He has reconciled**

God is reaching-out to lost mankind in order to make peace with them. He sent His Son, Jesus make peace through the blood of the Cross.

Romans 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...

Through the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross God has reconciled you to Himself. We were at war with God but now we have peace with God by grace through faith in Jesus.

Since you have peace with God, you are enabled by His indwelling Spirit to be a peacemaker as you move through this world on your way to Heaven. The idea of being a peacemaker is at least two-fold:

1. First, you desire that other men and women would be reconciled to God and have the same peace with God that you experience as a Christian.
2. Second, you desire to be at peace with others, as much as is possible in this fallen world.

If you've experienced peace with God you will not care so much about your rights when others wrong you. Instead you will see their need to be born-again. You will understand that their words and actions are directed by their sin nature. You will care less about your temporary trouble and more about their eternal address.

When you *do* care more about your rights when you are wronged it is a symptom that you have spiritual tunnel vision. It leads you to be a peace breaker.

It makes you act like Joab. As much as I admire the loyalty and courage of Joab as David's general, he ignored the will of his king and put everyone in the nation at risk in order to fulfill his own selfish desire.

We do the same thing when we have tunnel vision. We ignore the will of our King, the Lord, Jesus Christ. And we put everyone else around us in jeopardy.

The latest research by the Barna Group discovered a sad trend in the church in America. "Christians are becoming more ingrown and less outreach-oriented." To put it in the language we're using, the church is suffering more and more from tunnel vision that does not see the bigger picture. It can only lead to more and more internal conflict, hurting our witness to a lost world.

#2 All You Seek Is The Lord
When You Choose To Make Peace
(v28-39)

I don't know if David was right or wrong to receive Abner as he did. I can't say whether David purposely waited until Joab was away to have the state dinner or if it was in God's timing. I'm not sure he handled Joab's murder of Abner properly.

What I can say is that David had big spiritual peripheral vision to pursue peace among God's people. Thus he acted graciously and mercifully, first to Abner and then to Joab. His vision put an end to hostilities just when things could have gotten totally out of hand. In short, David was a peacemaker.

2 Samuel 3:28 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.

2 Samuel 3:29 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 or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread."

David's tough talking does not contradict his heart as a peacemaker. God has raised up nations, and governments, to steward over the well-being of

their citizens. He has given government the power of the sword – of life and death, and to wage war when there is no alternative.

It is not contradictory to be a peacemaker but also wield the power of the sword or, in this case, to pronounce a curse.

David disciplined Joab but in a merciful way so as to preserve peace both in his southern kingdom and among the northern tribes.

2 Samuel 3:30 So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.

2 Samuel 3:31 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." And King David followed the coffin.

Verse thirty tells us that David understood the motive of Joab and Abishai. Verse thirty-one tells us he demanded they rise above their selfishness and do what was right to preserve peace, for the good of the citizens they served.

He was thinking big by asking these boys to show respect for the general they'd just murdered. He had a huge vision for what God could accomplish through a united Israel.

2 Samuel 3:32 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.

2 Samuel 3:33 And the king sang a lament over Abner and said: "Should Abner die as a fool dies?"

2 Samuel 3:34 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.

2 Samuel 3:35 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!"

Remember that Abner had led Saul's army out against David all those years that Saul was trying to kill him. Remember that Abner had set up a rival king even though he knew David was God's anointed.

As personal as all that was, it was time to be more concerned about others. It was time to act kingly. The very act that could have permanently broken

peace between the tribes got turned into the thing that would bring them together.

David showed as much respect as possible for Abner. He didn't lie about him or inflate his integrity.

His song, along with the attendance of Joab and Abishai, showed that he would not let his own feelings or the feelings of others break the peace. He didn't cover for them or make excuses for them.

It wasn't a case of peace at any price. It was a case of endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

2 Samuel 3:36 Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, since whatever the king did pleased all the people.

2 Samuel 3:37 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.

Who would have thought that in the aftermath of Joab and Abishai murdering Abner there could be peace? David, that's who, and he let his spiritual peripheral vision dictate a course of action that would make peace.

2 Samuel 3:38 Then the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?"

David said nothing of his grace, only of his grandeur, his high birth and civil achievements. He praised him in what he was commendable. There was just cause of mourning because the fall or death of such a man was a public loss and matter of lamentation. After all, Abner had ultimately brought peace.

2 Samuel 3:39 And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me. The Lord shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness."

David was practical. His kingship was fledgling. He had not really come into his own. Though everything he did pleased the people, Joab was also popular and powerful, as was Abishai. To treat them harshly would threaten the peace Abner had come to establish.

It's never peace at any price. Being a peacemaker doesn't mean you have to take whatever is dished out. You can sometimes quit your job. You might need to file a grievance at work. It might be OK to complain through proper channels.

It *does* mean that these should not be your first thoughts. Your first thought should be about the eternal condition of the soul or souls of those troubling you. God may have put you in the exact position you are in to reach them with the Gospel. To the extent you are genuinely more concerned about their souls than, say, your salary, they will see the outworking of the new, divine nature within you.

They may respond favorably; they may respond unfavorably. But at least they will have been confronted with the supernatural effect of the Holy Spirit on your life.

How much more should we be willing to be peacemakers in the church. We should have big spiritual peripheral vision to see what God can do through us corporately if we look away from self and to serving one another.

Sometimes that will mean overlooking offenses. If we cannot overlook them, then we must overcome them in a biblical manner, seeking reconciliation with others for the greater good of the testimony of the Gospel.

I think these situations come in order to give us the opportunity to practice our peacemaking. Being at peace is more important than getting my way.

What about the world at large? How can we be peacemakers in our volatile, violent world? Does it mean we become pacifists? Or, on the other end of things, strap on *peacemakers* - Colt .45's?

No. *At least to being pacifists!* As we've already said, it is not contradictory to be a peacemaker but also wield the power of the sword.

A peacemaker must sometimes declare the death penalty, or declare war, to stop the aggression of those it is not possible to coexist with in peace.

God is the ultimate peacemaker. One day, though, He will judge those who have finally rejected His offer of reconciliation. He will punish them severely. It is perfectly within His character to do so; in fact, He could not be God unless He judged sin.

We are ambassadors who spread the peace of God. Start seeing your conflicts with others as opportunities to be God's peacemaker. Retain or regain a big vision for Who God is and for what He is doing in the world and in the church.

