

## Dangerous Thinking

2Samuel 3:1-39

*If you have read your bible cover to cover then you know it is full of people who do foolish and evil things and those foolish and evil things come at great cost.*

A good example of this is a king of Israel named Ahaziah.

He only held the throne for two years because one day, while he was walking around in his upper room, he fell through the lattice and was seriously injured.

While he is lying in bed he tells some servants to go to Ekron, a Philistine city, and inquire of Baal-zebub to see if he will get better.

God tells the prophet Elijah to go and meet the messengers and ask them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus says the Lord, 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'"

So the messengers return to the king with the message. When the king hears the message and the description of the messenger he knows it is Elijah so he sends a captain and his fifty men to retrieve the prophet.

*The captain finds Elijah sitting on top of a hill and is no wiser than his king saying to Elijah, "O man of God, the king says, 'come down.'"*

He thinks his king has authority to command a prophet of the living God.

Elijah says, "If I am a man of God let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty."

That is what happens. Now you think that might give you pause, but the king sends another captain and his fifty and the second captain speaks just as arrogantly as the first and he and his fifty meet the same fate.

Ahaziah sends another captain and his fifty. The third captain though shows more wisdom than the first two. When he comes to Elijah he falls on his knees and pleads for mercy and the LORD graciously gives him mercy while the prideful unrepentant king receives no mercy.

*One of the things I take away from that passage in the bible is that it is possible for people to keep making the same mistakes and fail to learn from them.*

That is foolishness.

Another lesson that we can take away from that text is that it is possible to learn from the mistakes of others.

Seeing what had happened, the third captain humbled himself and his humility saved his life and the life of his men.

I think we can all agree that we all make mistakes.

I think we can all agree that it is wise to learn from our mistakes.

Hopefully, we can see that it is even wiser to learn from the mistakes of others.

[That is my hope for our text this morning in **2Samuel 3:1-39** that we would learn to avoid some dangerous patterns of thinking that we find in this chapter. The things that we find in this text are things that we are all susceptible to and we would be fools to imagine that we can do the same things and get a different result. So let's look together and give our attention to the warnings that we find here. The first warning is this, that...]

**Point #1 – It is dangerous to think we can ignore God's designs. (Verses 1-5)**

It is easy, especially when things are going fairly well from an earthly perspective, to think we can get away from God's blueprint and everything will be fine.

*At first glance, things at the beginning of this chapter seem to be all good.*

Verse one tells us that in the long war between the house of Saul and the house of David that *'David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.'*

That is good news for David and it is what we would expect given that it is God's will to make him the king over all Israel.

Things are going well and it looks like victory is inevitable.

Verse two begins with the news that *'sons were born to David at Hebron.'*

Children are a gift from the LORD and the first five verses here tell us that David had six sons while he ruled in Hebron.

*That is good news. He names his firstborn 'Amnon' which means faithful. No doubt David had in mind all that the LORD had brought him through when he named his oldest son.*

Next is Chileab which means 'like his father', then Absalom whose name means 'my father is peace', his fourth son he names Adonijah meaning 'my lord is Yahweh', fifth is Shephatiah 'Yahweh has judged' likely an expression of feeling vindicated by God, and finally Ithream is born and his name means 'profit (gain) of the people'.

Just from the names of these boys there is sense that everything is going great.

Here is the problem, each of these boys is born to David by a different wife.

God's design for marriage is one man and one woman and David has disregarded that.

*I have no doubt he knew about God creating Adam and Eve and the proclamation that the two should become one.*

He should have known Deuteronomy 17:14-17 which commanded the king to not have many wives, but he does not follow God's design here.

Why? Perhaps it is a cultural blind spot. Having many wives in the ancient world was a sign of power and wealth.

Maybe David thought this is just the way it is for kings.

Some of it is surely strategic. When he married Abigail he gained wealth and land. Maacah we are told here is the daughter of the king of Geshur which likely indicates the marriage happened for political reasons.

Whatever the reason, God's design is not followed here and that is going to lead to a whole heap of trouble in the future.

[Every good engineer knows this principle. This summer I had the chance to go under the new Gordie Howe Bridge. It is an amazing structure designed to carry incredible loads and every person that drives over it is putting their trust in the engineers who designed it and they are trusting that the people who built it followed the design. Why? Because if that gets ignored the bridge will fall down. Do you know what proves a good design and build of a bridge? Time. If the design is good and if it is followed it will last.]

The very same thing is true in terms of the choices we make in life.

It is impossible to get a better engineer than someone who knows absolutely everything and has known it into all eternity past.

There is no better plan or design and if we ignore that it is going to lead us into trouble.

If we think otherwise it is because we are believing a lie that we are being told or a lie that we are telling ourselves.

Those lies are most effective when things are going good.

When we seem to get ahead taking a short cut we think we've gotten away with something.

When we feel good or happy in the short term we may be tempted to stop listening to God's word.

Don't fall for that! It won't last.

[When Adam watched Eve eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and she didn't drop dead he no doubt thought it was ok to go ahead and eat it himself. Turned out it was not ok and 930 years later his body returned to dust. It is the same for us. Ignore God and sooner or later trouble will come. Here is a second important lesson...]

**Point #2 – It is dangerous to think too much of ourselves. (Verses 6-21)**

One of the biggest ways if not the biggest way to distort our view of the world is to overestimate our own ability to control what happens in life.

Verse 6 tells us that while the war was going on “Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul.”

That is why he had installed Saul's son Ish-bosheth as king over most of the tribes of Israel.

That becomes very clear here when Ish-bosheth calls him out for some of his behaviour.

Listen carefully to what Abner says in response in **verses 8-10**.

Without question Abner had a position of worldly power and influence as the head of Saul's army, but it is clear that the power he possessed had gone to his head.

Verse 9 is really telling. He admits that he has known all along that the LORD had sworn to give the kingdom to David.

He says the same thing again when he is speaking to the elders of Israel in verse 18.

Knowing God's promise, what was he doing making Ish-bosheth king then?

Did he think that he could go against God and prevail?

Now that he is angry with Ish-bosheth he claims under oath that he will be the one to accomplish for David what “the LORD has sworn.”

So on one hand he thinks he can resist the will of God and on the other he is the one who will make the will of God happen.

We see a similar sentiment in verse 12 and again in verse 21.

It seems to me that the only way to understand that is that he thought of the will of God as depending upon him.

Was he in a position of power? Yes, we can see that as he delivers Michal back to David and as he confers with the elders of Israel.

Does the LORD use people to bring about what He wills? Yes.

Does God's will depend on people as though He has no other options? Not a chance.

*The right thing for Abner to do was to fall on his face in repentance for having opposed the LORD and praise Him for His grace in not putting an end to him in an instant.*

It is not a heart of repentance that moves Abner, but rather petty anger which is fueled by his pride that causes him to take action to make David king.

He thinks too much of himself.

[Perhaps you have seen this in the workplace. You know the employee who thinks they are indispensable? They act as if the company exists because of them and if they ever left the company would go out of business. Do you know what happens when they leave or retire? Most of the time things carry on just fine. Why? Because the employee who thinks so much of himself/herself isn't nearly as important and they believe themselves to be.]

God uses people to bring about His will, but His will never depends on people.

Instead of thinking "God can't do it without me", we should think "It is amazing that God can use someone like me."

Making too much of ourselves like Abner does here is easy to spot, but we can also make too much of ourselves by saying things like, "God can never use me" or "I don't need to serve God because He is going to do whatever He wants anyway."

Things like that sound more spiritual and humble, but when we say things like that we are still making much of ourselves.

That is dangerous. It is dangerous because we are making God small in our eyes and when we do that we are cultivating a spirit of disobedience and idolatry in our hearts.

[Despite Abner's motivations being questionable, he does use his influence to persuade other people that David should be king according to God's promise. It is an example of the LORD working in everything to accomplish His purposes. According to verses 12-13 Abner and David commit to entering into a 'covenant' with one another to establish David's reign over the whole nation. That is important to keep in mind as we move into the next section of this chapter. A promise has been made between these two before the LORD and that is why it says at the end of verse 21 that Abner "went in peace." Things are looking good, they are going according to Abner's plan, but everything takes a turn in verses 22-30 and that is where we learn this third lesson about dangerous thinking, that...]

**Point #3 – It is dangerous to be motivated by revenge. (Verses 22-30)**

When we are driven by paying others back for wrongs done to us, we can very easily drift away from what is right in the eyes of the LORD.

Verse 22 tells us that Joab was not around for the meetings David had with Abner and again repeats the phrase that Abner had “departed in peace” and that phrase is repeated again in verse 23.

**Verses 24-25** gives us Joab’s reaction.

No doubt there is a bit of Joab thinking too much of himself here.

His question of “What have you done?” is a rhetorical one. It is a question that is showing disbelief and contempt for David who is both his king and his uncle.

That said, his concern is technically correct. It is reasonable to think that someone who has been your enemy for years may have dishonest motives in making an offering of peace.

That is a real concern, but he is just using that to cover his real intentions.

**Verse 26-27** show us what he is really up to.

Verse 30 tells us that Joab’s brother Abishai was also involved in this.

Their concern is not for the wellbeing of the king, the nation, or even that justice be served.

Their concern was revenge.

Ironically, Joab had expressed concern that Abner’s intention was to deceive, but he and his brother are the ones who use deception to accomplish their goal.

They send messengers to tell Abner to come back without David’s knowledge.

Joab knows full well Abner will come back without suspicion of danger because the bible says repeatedly that, “he had gone in peace.”

This is more than a handshake deal.

David has committed to making a “covenant” with Abner according to verse 13.

That is most literally translated “cut a covenant” which refers to the kind of covenant made where animals are divided in two and the parties making the commitment to one another walk in between the pieces.

It was a way saying that if somebody goes back on their commitment then what happened to the animal would happen to him.

So Abner departs in the peace of a solemn oath likely taken in the name of the LORD.

Joab and his brother disregard all of that for the sake of revenge.

Whereas Asahel their brother had fallen in battle and had been given opportunity to save his life, Abner is murdered through deception.

Joab and Abishai plunge themselves into rebellion against God's law for the sake of revenge.

[Have you ever heard of something called a 'blinder' sometimes called a 'blinker'? It is the head gear that they put on horses during a race. The purpose of a blinder is to limit the peripheral vision of the horse so that it can only see forward. It keeps them from distraction and fear and keeps them on task. Those are good things for horses during a race, but you wouldn't keep it on the horse all the time that would be bad for the horse.]

Being motivated by revenge is sort of like putting a blinder on and keeping it on.

It robs us of our capacity to see outside our desire for retribution.

It robs us of our capacity to seek true justice and entrust ourselves to the sovereign rule of God.

It robs us of our capacity for grace and forgiveness.

I can think of few things more harmful to the witness of the gospel in the world than a Christian who is bitter and unwilling to forgive.

In fact, I believe Jesus warns us in more than one place in His word that an unwillingness to forgive is clear evidence that we don't belong to Him and are still objects of God's wrath rather than objects of His eternal love.

*How can we say we understand what Jesus has done for us if we are filled with bitterness and anger towards others?*

Please understand I am not trying to minimize the wrongs done to anyone, but I am trying to magnify the grace of God in Christ.

He died for you so that you can be forgiven and that same offer is extended to everyone who would believe in His life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of their sins.

Do we want that for people who have hurt us or are we blinded by revenge?

[Listen, when our thinking is locked onto payback that is an incredibly dangerous place to be because it blinds us to the glory of the gospel of peace. It causes us to act in ways that show contempt for the covenant of grace sealed in the blood of God's One and Only Son. That is a dangerous way to think and it is not the way Christians should think. It is dangerous to ignore God's designs, it is dangerous to make too much of ourselves, and it is dangerous to be motivated by revenge. That brings us to one more lesson from this text. What happens if we stay locked into dangerous thinking? That thinking will result in action which is what we see here in this text. That can only lead to one place, which is the lesson from verses 31-39, here is the lesson...]

**Point #4 – Dangerous thinking that turns into action leads to sorrow. (Verses 31-39)**

Jesus teaches us that evil begins in the heart and mind and if it is allowed to abide there it will get worked out in our lives and that always has an unhappy ending.

Look with me at verse 31.

The consequence for Joab here is mild compared to what David could/should have given him, but he at least exercises enough authority over his nephew to put him at the front of the funeral procession.

He commands the people to tear their clothes and put on sackcloth which are two common actions in a situation of lament.

David probably does the same and he follows the funeral procession.

According to verses 32-34 David weeps and laments with all the people at the loss.

He goes a step further, according to verse 35, and fasts until evening as another way to emphasize his sorrow.

Just like when David had lamented over the loss of Saul, some interpreters would say that David's actions here are political.

He just wants to keep the people from being angry with him because of what happened to Abner.

That is possible, but given the context and the covenant that David was willing to make earlier in the chapter, it seems far more likely that he is shedding real tears and is genuinely upset by what has happened.

That is the way he should feel. That is the nature of thinking and acting in a way that goes against the laws of God.

We do that and pain follows.



[Just think for a moment about the bad things that happen in the world. Isn't that a reason some people use to say they don't believe in God. If God exists then why is there so much suffering in the world? That is a good question. I wonder how many people who ask that question think about how much suffering would disappear if human beings obeyed God's laws. What if people loved God, honoured their parents, and told the truth, stopped cheating, stealing, lying, and wanting other people's stuff? If we did that would we even need prisons, police, judges, or lawyers?]

One of the things that people who are quick to get angry with God have a really hard time with is owning up to our contribution to the suffering and sorrow that is in the world.

The reality is that evil and sorrow go hand in hand.

If you have the one you must have the other.

Ignore God's designs and sooner or later there will be tears.

If we make too much of ourselves it will lead to pain.

If we hold on to bitterness and anger wanting to repay evil with evil then sorrow will be the end of it.

*If that is the case, what do we do?*

We fight against dangerous thinking.

That begins with confession, repentance, and faith.

We acknowledge God's ways are right and our ways are wrong and we believe in Christ alone to be made right before the LORD.

If we begin there then we will begin to see the incomprehensible grace of God and understand that we need to live in that grace to move away from patterns of dangerous thinking.

*By His grace, we fill our minds with God's blue prints for life and do our best to follow them.*

By His grace, we think of ourselves in humility, we see ourselves as humble servants rather than lords and masters.

We forgive others just as the LORD, in Christ, has forgiven us.

When we do those things we will find that dangerous thinking is replaced with righteous thinking and instead of sorrow we will find joy.