

Acting in Justice

2Samuel 4:1-12

How many of you have ever had an awkward moment when you are trying to cross the border?

That has happened to me on a few occasions, one happened fairly recently on a family trip to the US.

It started with usual questions.

Where are you going? How long are you going to be in the US? Do you have any drugs, alcohol, tobacco, etc.

Once they get through those kinds of questions they usually ask some other stuff not only to see if you are someone they should be letting into the country but also to fill some time while your passport is being scanned.

When we are all together they have to check six passports so it takes a minute.

So while to customs officer is scanning our passports he asks me, "What do you do for a living?"

I say, "I'm a pastor". I've been asked that before and in the past I've gotten the follow up question, "What is a pastor?"

Not this guy! He must have had a church background because he starts asking me more questions about what church, denomination, bible translation I use, and he asks me, "What is your life verse?"

For those of you who don't know, it used to be a thing in some church circles for people to pick one verse in the Bible that is really important to them that they think about every day and that shapes their whole life.

That was never a thing for me, so I said to him, "I can't really say I have a life verse."

All I can think in that moment is this guy is thinking,

"What kind of pastor doesn't have a life verse?"

So I follow up with, "If I had to pick one it would probably be Micah 6:8."

So he says to me, "What does that say?"

You need to know that I first memorized that verse over thirty years ago.

We have it up on the wall at our house in a giant picture frame that I walk past on a daily basis.

I have read it and recited it many times over the years, but in that moment I totally blanked.

So I fumble through the first few word and find myself at a total loss for the rest."

Now I'm thinking to myself, "I should have said John 3:16" and I turn to Michelle and ask, "What does it say?"

Before I could get it right he finished with the passports and sent us on our way no doubt thinking, "What kind of pastor can't recite a life verse, he congregation needs to find somebody else."

If you are wondering, "Yes my wife and children thought it was hilarious."

[While it was in doubt that day, I really do know and appreciate **Micah 6:8**, it says, "*He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*" While I was studying this morning's text **2Samuel 4:1-12** that verse came to my mind, especially the part about acting justly. The importance of justice is all throughout the Scriptures. The simplest and likely the best way to understand justice is to think about it as doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD. That is something that all of us should be deeply concerned about and this text has some helpful lessons for us in that regard. Here is the first...]

Point #1 – The opportunity to seek what is right in limited. (Verses 1-4)

The Lord in His kindness gives most of us an abundance of chances to make choices based on what is good in His sight, but sooner or later those chances run out.

This is a theme in both 1Samuel and 2Samuel. I would say it is a theme in the whole bible.

In most cases, if not all, people have several chances to turn away from what is wrong and towards what is right.

That is certainly the case here with Ish-bosheth.

He knew what God had said about David becoming king in place of Saul and yet with Abner's help he tried to take the throne for himself and that started a civil war in the country.

War is never a good thing. It is at times a necessary thing but it is never a good thing.

If Ish-bosheth had turned towards what was right the war would have ended immediately.

He had seven years to do that and we see here in the opening verse of chapter four he still has a chance. (**Verse 1**)

Abner had worked out a peace deal with David in chapter three but was not able to implement it on account of losing his life which throws everything back up in the air.

We are told here that when Ish-bosheth hears the news "his courage fails."

We are also told that "all Israel was dismayed".

Have you ever felt that way? Helpless, troubled, confused, and afraid?
Those feelings are invitations to seek the LORD and trust in His word.

In verses two and three we are told about two soldiers in Ish-bosheth's army, they were Beerothites who belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

Their dad's name is Rimmon which is the Hebrew word for 'pomegranate'. That is a very interesting name because the pomegranate is used several times in the first five books of the bible to show how wonderful and good the Promised Land is.

The pomegranate is also a prominent decoration in the embroidery of the Tabernacle.

From what I can gather the pomegranate is quite a good health food as well.

All of that is worth considering because it shows us that these two guys Baanah and Rechab have enjoyed God's provision and blessing in their lives up to this point and certainly would have had some understanding of what is right and they had the chance to seek it out.

We also read this in **verse 4**.

At first glance this verse seems out of place, but commentators like Carl Keil point out that it serves at least two important functions in the text.

First, it serves as a foreshadow of what will come later in the book and second it shows that Ish-bosheth is the last real challenge to the rule of David.

Jonathan's son being lame and also only about 11 or 12 years old at this point could not assume the throne, so if Ish-bosheth yields then the turmoil is over and the people of God can move on according to God's promise.

It is a way of saying that this thing is coming to an end. Ish-bosheth's time for seeking what is right is running out.

[I couldn't help but think of an hour glass here. An hour glass is two spheres join by a narrow cylinder and filled with a special kind of sand or tiny beads. When the hour glass is turned one way the sand/beads fall through the cylinder and into the other sphere at a reasonably constant rate until the glass is flipped or all the sand is transferred from one cylinder to the other. I find them mesmerizing to watch especially as it gets close to the end. It gives you a clear sense that the time is coming to an end.]

It has been my experience that most people pay little attention to the hour glass of life.

If we were to count all the opportunities the LORD has granted us to seek what is right it would be a number far bigger than most of us realize.

We see that consistently in the Bible.

Noah built the ark and preached the gospel for the better part of 100years giving people the chance to seek what is right.

How many prophets did the LORD send the Israelites before he sent them into exile for their idolatry?

The whole reason the Father sends the Son into the world is to give us the opportunity to seek what is right, but just like the sand in an hourglass comes to an end, so too does the opportunity to seek what is right.

[This is a limited commodity. What will we do with it? The sad truth of it is that many people persist in rebellion against God and eventually the LORD says, “That is enough.” Unfortunately, we can see that happen here in these verses. Not only do we see that happen we can also see one of the things that motivates people to ignore what God says about what is just and right. That is the second lesson from this text, that...]

Point #2 – Selfish ambition often disregards justice. (Verses 5-8)

When the desires of our heart are focused on our own sinful desires we will give little consideration to what God says is right.

Verse 5 sets the scene for us.

It is a common practice in many places in the world to take a break in the heat of the day, but is that what Ish-bosheth should be doing?

Commentator Matthew Henry looks down on his decision to take a nap when the situation called for urgent action.

He could have sought reconciliation with David, he could have admitted that God’s ways are better than his own, but instead he relaxes taking no initiative for what is right.

It was at that time Rechab and Baanah arrive at the house.

These two also have a choice between right and wrong before them.

As we have already seen, these men, though they were not ethnically Jewish, they had been counted as part of the tribe of Benjamin.

The reason the writer makes a point of telling us that is because that is the same tribe as Ish-bosheth.

Because they are from the same tribe we should expect them to show loyalty and kindness towards the son of Saul.

They could have done that by seeking what is right here.

It would have taken courage, but they could have gone to Ish-bosheth and said, “Stop fighting the LORD, stop thinking about power and position, and become David’s servant.”

That would have been most kind and just, but they do the complete opposite instead.

Verses 6-7 tell us that they enter the house using their position as ‘captains’ as cover acting as though they have come to get some wheat, probably for the men who served under them.

They make it look like there are there for something good, but instead take advantage of Ish-bosheth while he is defenceless and lying in bed.

They strike him down and then take evidence of what they have done to David.

The end of verse 7 says that they marched ‘all night’ to get to David at Hebron.

It could be that they marched all night because they were in a hurry, it could be that they travelled by night to stay hidden on account of their crime, or it could be a mix of both.

Whatever the reason, they come to David present to him the evidence of what they had done to Ish-bosheth and say this, ***“The LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring.”***

When you consider their urgency to get to David and the fact that they attribute their actions to the LORD, we can only reach one conclusion and that is they considered what they had done to be good news.

More than good news, good news that they would be rewarded for.

They had sized up the situation and concluded that sticking with the son of Saul was a losing proposition and they are trying to set themselves up for the best possible position on David’s side.

This is selfish ambition and because that is what is driving them they have no problem with deception and they have no problem with breaking the sixth commandment in the most cowardly of ways.

[I remember many years ago being with a friend as he drafted up a resume to get a job. He was young and inexperienced and in all honesty probably not qualified for the job he was trying to get. Someone else in the room gave him this advice. They said, “You’ve got to snow them’ meaning say things that aren’t true so you can get the job. He listened because his ambition moved him to ignore what is right.]

That can happen in so many ways.

Why do people say there is one law for the rich and another for the poor in our society?

Because wealthy people often offer their money to influence people and those people are often more interested in self-advancement than what is right.

Why is there so much money in politics? Because those that give the money believe they can get the politician to do what they want even if it is against the law.

Why do we lie? Because we want to benefit ourselves.

Why do we fight with those we love? Because we see them as keeping us from what we want.

Why do we use words to hurt people? To advance our own desires.

[By and large doing wrong things is not a matter of ignorance. By and large we do wrong things because we think it will be good for us. The truth is it never works out that way. Sooner or later we will run into the justice of the LORD. For Baanah and Rechab that happens right away. David acts in justice for what these two have done and from that we learn this third important lesson, that...]

Point #3 – True justice is consistently applied. (Verses 9-12)

If we are truly concerned about what is right in the eyes of the LORD then we will do our best to maintain the same standard from situation to situation and from person to person.

The beginning of David's response here in Verse 9 gives us the essential ingredient to acting in justice.

There is some fantastic theology in that phrase. We are reminded of God's self-existence, what theologians call the 'Aseity of God'.

That simply means that God exists in and of Himself need nothing outside of Himself to exist as He is for all eternity past and future.

'As the LORD lives' is a phrase expressing the absolute certainty of something because God always lives and He always lives as He is.

Because God exists in and of Himself nothing outside of Him can ever have power over Him.

That means He will never distort justice like we do because He will always act in a way consistent with His nature.

Amazing!

David also says here that the LORD has exercised His unchanging power on David's behalf redeeming his 'life out of every adversity.'

What he is saying is that his life is held in the power of our incorruptible God and if that is true then it removes every excuse for breaking God's law.

David did not need these guys to do what they did to prevail.

He then goes on to remind them of someone else who did something similar and how David had required his life on account of his evil and what these two have done is even worse and so they will receive the same fate.

That is what happens in verse 12 they receive justice and David makes a display of them so that everyone will know that what they did was wrong.

David is right to point out the importance of consistency when acting in justice because that is the way it should be.

[Western society in large part was built on that principle. How many of you have seen the statue of 'lady justice'? The statue is a woman holding scales in one hand suggesting that a verdict should be rendered by the weight of evidence, a sword in the other hand symbolizing the authority to carry out punishment, and she wears a blindfold symbolizing that justice should not be influenced by who the defendant happens to be. The statue is supposed to remind us that justice is a standard that should be applied to everyone consistently.]

As Christians we should have no problem agreeing with those principles, we should strive for that absolutely, but we also understand that human beings fall short of that ideal.

David here shows consistency between the sons of Rimmon and the Amalekite that we met back in chapter one, but he fails to apply that same standard to his nephew Joab at the end of chapter three.

He does condemn Joab's actions against Abner, but he refrains from implementing the same kind of punishment that is given in chapter one and here in chapter four for the exact same crime.

He acts in justice but we can see some inconsistency in the new king.

It is a subtle reminder that we need someone better than a good earthly king.

We should want good earthly leaders, we should pray for politicians, judges, and lawmakers to seek true justice.

We are very far from that these days. Our laws are upside down. There seems to be less and less concern for protecting people, our laws enable evil and self-destructive behavior, our laws call evil good and good evil, many in our society want to condemn or absolve people based on the color of their skin, that is not justice, and we should all long for better.

But no matter how good things might get on this side of eternity we always need to keep in mind that there is only One perfectly just King and that is the LORD Himself.

God is so just that He punishes every act of rebellion against Him with a punishment that fits the crime.

When you hear me say that, hopefully you are asking the question, "what about forgiveness and grace?"

Praise God He is more forgiving and gracious than we could possibly understand, but His grace and forgiveness is neither arbitrary nor is it unjust.

If the LORD ignored the wrong things we do and called that forgiveness He would not be just.

He doesn't ignore anything, Jesus, Who is God the Son, takes our punishment for us.

He perfectly satisfies the justice of God on our behalf.

The Lord shows no favoritism, His perfect justice is given to all people.

His justice is either satisfied in Jesus' work on the cross, or it is satisfied through eternity in hell.

The question of a person's eternity is not determined by what they look like, their wealth, poverty, or fame.

A person's eternity is based on whether or not they have accepted Jesus Christ as LORD and saviour.

If we understand that even a little bit then we are going to want to seek what is right in our lives, we are going to want to be people who care about justice because that is who God is.

I hope that is all of us this morning, but if there are some within the sound of my voice who could care less about what is right I want to remind you that time is running out for you.

There is only so many grains of sand in your hour glass before you meet the living God. Don't miss the opportunities He is giving to you to seek what is right.

As we seek what is right we need to guard against the pitfall of selfish ambition which can so easily move us towards injustice.

Lastly, we need to do all that we can to be consistent because that is the only way to act in true justice.

Will we be perfect? Not in this present world, but in our striving for what is right we can point people to the God who is perfect in all His ways.

That is what Micah 6:8 is all about, "*He has shown you o man what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*"