

**BY PASTOR TIM DODSON**  
**AT JF BELIEVERS CHURCH**  
**IN MENOMONIE WISCONSIN**  
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**"Bitterness, Deceit, Treachery,  
and what could have been."**

**- 2 Samuel 3**

David had survived many years of trials and persecution. He had remained faithful to God and to Israel despite having been given...*in the flesh*, plenty of good reasons to 'throw in the towel.' He was becoming...what God Himself described as "a man after mine own heart." (Acts 13:22 and 1 Samuel 13:14) As time went on, David grew stronger and more secure in the eyes of the people because he was indeed God's choice. David was reigning over Judah, while Ish-bosheth...the son of King Saul, had been placed over Israel by Abner, who had been Saul's commander-in-chief as well as Saul's cousin. Ish-bosheth and the house of Saul grew weaker and less popular over the passing of time, as the two families continued to battle over the kingship of Israel has a whole. The fight dragged on and on apparently. And while we must seek peace whenever and *however* possible short of compromising the foundational elements of scripture, we all know that some folks just aren't going to let it go and let you be. Romans 12:18 "If it is possible, *as far as it depends on you*, live at peace with everyone."

David...while enjoying short periods of peace, was essentially locked into a life of constant struggle. Not because he was a trouble maker or an instigator, but because as a man called by God and a man in love with his God, there would be a price to pay in this world for being *a man used by God*. The disciple of Christ will endure varying spiritual and worldly struggles and warfare, because Satan will not relent and will not bow to our decision to follow Christ. Such conflicts are both personal and service oriented and are not only common in the lives of the faithful, but characteristically a certainty. On the left we fight our flesh and sin as described in Romans 7, and on the right we battle Satan and false believers who attack us for our commitment to Him and His kingdom.

One thing is for sure, a faithful life will result in a level of oppression and demands a degree of spiritual endurance. Paul has much to say about such endurance and standing in hardships. Many have indeed begin this race, but a lot less will actually finish it, because they are ill-prepared for what is required and do not love Jesus enough to steel their hearts and backs against the daily onslaught of the world. Scripture tells us that "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you...*" 1 Peter

4:12 and Hebrews 12:3 says "*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*"

Ephesians 6 describes an "armor of God" that has been provided to *assist us* in this battle we fight, but no where is there literally a way out of such short of death, and never is there given a 'free pass' to step off of such a fray albeit we certainly would like to at times. Those who do, according to scripture are not simply marginal Christians, but in fact not Christians at all. Having 'turned back', they have acknowledged they are not fit for the kingdom of God. "*The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*" (1 Corinthians 10:13)

I am not saying that God is expecting sinless perfection, or a flawless life, because we will all fail at that. But when we purposely build in such 'elbow room' into our faith lives, we cannot claim that our real desire is a holy life, because in fact such says we want some fleshly latitude. A truly changed life is not seeking compromise and leeway, but is desiring with all one's heart to live in holiness and fulfillment of the body life I have been called to.

So Abner...by his own admission, had been a long and loyal supporter of Saul and his family. But suddenly there was a rift, one that was caused by Abner getting his feelings hurt. Certainly Abner was out of line on his behavior in this instance, as it was well understood that a kings concubines became the property of his successor upon his death. So for Abner to sleep with this concubine was not only theft and dishonest, but it was a way to claim power, position, and even insinuate the usurping of the thrown of power. Obviously Abner was interested in getting his own dominance and supremacy through the exercise of his actions toward the family of Saul and the nation as a whole. Like so many folks, he was a backer and supporter until he was slighted in some way or "dis'd" in some fashion. This kind are 'sold by the dozen' in this world and have passed through a lot of churches seeking honor and a badge.

Suddenly with Abner "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." I know I have had to intervene in disputes and drawn out arguments between people in this church in the past, and when finally they turned that self-centered purpose towards the church itself and moved on, they so often went out and saddled up to the very person who they had such a distaste for while here! So, nothing has changed since Abner. Abners actions were the temper tantrums of a spoiled child, and he did not after all really know what loyalty and commitment was despite his assertion to the contrary!

David was willing to hear this Abner, but not for Abners sake, rather for the national best interest. David did however put one stipulation on this deal, and that was that he would receive back to him Michal his wife. During His years of running, Saul, who is Michals father, married her off to another man, essentially forcing her into an adulterous situation. Now herein, David was taking advantage of the events to demand his wife back after all these years. Abner and apparently Ish-bosheth agreed to this demand, and in short time Michal was on her way back to David, with her present husband following her crying. Finally Abner apparently had heard enough and sent him home!

Now whether Abner could indeed be trusted in the long run was left in question. His new allegiance to David was clearly motivated by his bitterness and distaste for Ish-bosheth and his old position where he was disrespected and denied the street-cred that he thought he deserved. David however showed him kindness. David clearly wanted unity and peace, and was fine with doing so in an affectively 'bloodless coup.' Apparently David's ego was not so frail as to need to exercise a serious whooping on the boys over in Israel in the house of Ish-bosheth. He didn't need to draw blood or make a public example of them. He just wanted harmony and the chance to move on as a man and as a people.

But despite his best attempts, hearts of division and bitterness were still ripe around him, and would drag him and the nation down with them if given a chance. God calls upon us throughout the Bible to seek reconciliation and to do so with a humble spirit...forever remembering that there is affectively one boss and one king, and we're not it! Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:18 that we have been 'reconciled' to God and have now been given that same ministry priority...the 'ministry of reconciliation' in the world we live in today, post redemption.

Now everything was moving along splendidly when suddenly Joab comes back home. Joab of course, was not a big fan of Abner's because Abner had killed his brother back in chapter 2! If we read again the first words of chapter 3, we find the proclamation that "*there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David.*" We can gather then that a long period of time had passed between chapter 2 and chapter 3, but clearly Joab had not forgotten. His memory had not faded on the events of his brother's death, nor had the bitterness in his heart which apparently had only *grown* over what was likely a period of years. A once heard a pastor say that 'bitterness is like a twinkie...you can unwrap that thing *years* later and it's still as sweet and tasty..."

Upon returning home and hearing of the events that had transpired in his absence, Joab immediately is knocking on David's door and spewing conspiracy theories and challenging David's authority. Joab...a man who has up until this time been a loyal supporter of David would now take matters into his own hands. It seems we all have our limits when it comes to loyalty and to our support of others. A man's or woman's true character is herein revealed. As the old saying goes, one 'doesn't know what kind of tea you are until you are put into hot water!' Joab was in it, and revealing that when he wanted something bad enough he would throw those he pretended to love and support under the proverbial bus. Joab would essentially become as bad or worse of a character display than that of Abner, the very one who Joab is pointing his finger at claiming deceit! It is a fine case of the "pot calling the kettle black."

Joab no doubt felt he was justified. But who doesn't in such situations? We all feel that we have at some point been pushed beyond our limit and the extreme, albeit ungodly, action we intend to take because of such is justified and a measured response. After all..."*if people just understood what that guy did to me...*" well, they would not only understand, but they would no doubt agree with my actions! Who has not seen the news casts of protesters on some issue or another, negate their cause by acting out in a worse fashion than the one who is guilty of the action which precipitated the protest? How many have become violent and turned over and burned cars and looted shops, broke windows, and manifested all sorts of mayhem because they were protesting violence by police?

How many have been angered enough to lie about someone to hurt them publically, or damage property that belongs to them, or act in some other way to purposely hurt someone in what can only be described as retribution and revenge...all the while mumbling about the need for them to learn a lesson and all of humanity will be safer and better off once such occurs and further more you are just the man to do it! You can paint it all in any fashion you like, but it's still just revenge. The super bowl is still just a football game no matter who big a game it might be for some folks. The day after the game, life goes on. The sun comes back up and we put our pants on and go back to work, eat lunch, drive home and go to bed just like we did the day *before* the game. The difference is that before and during the game we have lost our perspective and now are screaming at the TV like the players can actual hear us!

How many people that are sitting in prison for the rest of their lives started that fateful day like any other except for the growing anger and bitterness in their heart and sometime during the day Satan pushed that fateful button and they went on to act out in such a way that there was no coming back. How many are literally *dead* because of that fact? How many allowed that angst to build until they were they guy who walks into their work place or the local courthouse with a gun and in the aftermath are now in fact dead and maybe a lot of innocent folks along with them? we can say...no, no...that will never happen to me, and I will contest that most of those people who did indeed do that, at one time said the same thing...

So now Joab moves to take matters into his own hands...as we so often do, and by doing so both he and us are saying that our God is either aloof, disinterested, unknowledgeable to the finer aspects of the case, or purely incapable of handling such matters himself, and *righteously Himself!* So apparently God 'needs our help' so we dawn the superheroes cape and intervene to defend right over wrong. But in the end, the situation that precipitated our actions has not changed...Joab's brother was still dead, but now so is Abner, and Joab is the recipient of a family wide curse. And further, Joab's actions were now endangering the King he said he supported because his actions would indirectly make David seeming complicit in Abners death because Joab is so keenly connected to David.

Recently a guy told me he was stepping off the spiritual front line and would subsequently look for something easier to live with as to church, mission, and community. He said he 'didn't want to have to be an example' of what is essentially commitment, faith, fortitude and character. And now today ironically he is the bright white example of self-centeredness, spiritual quitting, lying and lack of love for his brethren, worldly priorities, and more such negative pictures. He literally *became* an exaggerated cartoon version of an public example. But sadly, a *negative* one, that says to the world that those who he once called brothers and sisters are *just like him*. After all, he *came from the midst of them*, so all of the midst be the same kind of people, *right?*

David, just like us, had to move 'double time' to extinguish that picture. David would make it clear he had nothing to do with that event, and put the fire directly under Joab. Not because he wanted to. Not because he was trying to protect himself or bolster his public appeal. But for the sake of the people. For their safety and well being. I know that position well. I'm sure dealing with Joab's mess was not a pleasant situation for David, just as it isn't for me or the other leadership here at this church in similar cases of 'guilt by association.' Times when we had to firmly distance ourselves from someone we love because their lives speak contrary to Christ and scripture and we don't want people to think that such is Christianity or for that matter JFB.

We all tend to think that any and all actions can be back-pedaled out of. We may not consciously stop and consider such but that is the tendency of man. But the fact is, something's we do will forever change the trajectory of our lives. While God is gracious and forgiving, restoration and worldly redemption is not always available. I am reminded of the story of Lonnie Frisbee...back in the roots days of Calvary Chapel movement. How God so powerfully moved in him, and how in the end he had rebelled against all authority in his life, thrown his friends and church under the bus, delved deep into the flesh and sin and in the end...lay in that hospital bed dying of AIDS, surrounded by those he had rejected...forgiving and being forgiven. Frisbee would die in that bed. And while he was forgiven, he was never restored, for the decisions had been made and the damage had been done.

Joab would play ball again. But he would always be running from himself and his actions and in the end, would be chased down and killed at the death bed bequest of King David. His own anger and bitterness would in the end be his own end.