



**"Doing the Wrong
Thing for the Right
Reasons."**
- 2 Samuel 4

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on Wednesday Mar 22nd, 2017

What strikes me most about this story is the fact that these guys actually thought...throughout the entire event, that they were doing a good thing, and how very wrong they were. It seems that in our society today we have wholly embraced the idea that the "end justifies the means." And even as a culture of Christians we have somewhere lost the biblical principle that we are not only to do the right thing but that God so often has also a way for us to do it. A way of obedience.

Scripture is full of examples of this plight. Moses tried to correct the children of Israel over their complaining...which effectually needed to be done, but he went about it the wrong way when he struck the rock. Another is when King David attempted to bring home the Ark of the Covenant. While his motives were good and the premise sound, the way he went about it cost lives because while he had a great idea, his plan was not well thought out nor did it encompass the parameters that God had laid down concerning that act.

Many of us have also endured some pain over this issue and practice. We often have moved with good intentions, but the goal was the only thing in mind instead of the journey.

Today we live in a world where two distinct philosophies are at war. The first philosophy is the Jesus way. It is a world of sacrifice, submission, humility, and patience. It is the worldview of Jesus where God is at the center of our lives and as His disciples we live to care for others because that is the model we were given by Christ Himself. In the Jesus world, it is not about us, it is about God. The Jesus way shows us that the 'means' is just as important as the 'ends.'

The other philosophy is the me centered culture of this world. It is a world of consumption, gain, status, position, and fame. In the consumer world it is all about what I want and when I want it. Little concern is given to 'what's behind the curtain' of truth...the collateral damage, the secondary players...the innocent bystanders. If this were not true, we would have fewer terrorist bombings, divorces, and church splits.

Sadly, our consumer culture has created the consumer church, which in turn has given us consumer Christians. The consumer Christian culture is about receiving benefits and getting into heaven. Maybe that's why you are here? Thus the grand story is about *man* rather than *God*. It is about cultivation of temporal wants, the fostering of personal feelings and agendas. It's about individual gratification, the teaching of scripture in a way to not offend...shining the bright light on God's patient grace while avoiding His holiness and judgment.

These two worlds are at war—they are mortal enemies. The alarming thing is that many good Christian people live their lives day after day without ever knowing they have been seduced by the culture and it's 'permission' to be self-seeking and self-centered. They have forgotten that they cannot serve both God and the world...which includes themselves.

For centuries man lived in a world that valued community and, in religious terms, the congregation. But along came the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, and since then God has been moved out of the center and replaced by man. Now...*yes, even in the greater church*, individual rights, individual thoughts, and individual wants and needs are paramount. No longer is it...*as Spock put it*, a world where 'the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one.'

The church congregation is supposed to be the local home base where the Christian life is formed. It is where our identity is developed. However, the congregation is not **about** us—it is about God! God's plan is to create a new community where his disciples learn to love him by loving one another. Thus in the Christ centered paradigm, the operating biblical metaphor for worship is sacrifice. We gather to contribute to one another's lives. We come to church to sacrifice, to serve, to set aside our personal agenda. Thus within that dynamic, we, like Jesus, choose to live the life of submission to God but also to others, to put their needs equal to ours, even, I dare say, more important than our own.

These two men would no doubt have claimed what they were doing was motivated by nationalism... 'king and country' so to speak. No doubt they 'meant well.' They were just going to 'help the king' and of course not bother that same king with prior discussion and seeking of direction from him! They were in a hurry and they certainly didn't need any advise or counseling from anyone else. I guess they were much like us today. For today impatience could be the most accepted sin in America. We are a people in a hurry. Not in a hurry to give or change, but to gain and to be.

Not only does it seem that everything is available to us now ...good's and service from around the world available in our neighborhood, but we now expect it all at 4G speeds, overnight delivery, and philosophically with a 'click of the mouse.' The culture is getting faster and faster, but ironically the greater we *achieve*, the less we actually *become*. From our elections to our churches, people want relief and answers today and if not today, at the latest, tomorrow. We want leaders who please us, not those who will challenge and change us. And that goes for elected officials and church pastors alike.

Take for example the reading of scripture as a practice in our 'devotional life', *if you will*. Why do we go there? Do we read to gain spiritual and emotional 'sound-bites'? Pithy "twitter" length one-liners, bumper sticker advice and t-shirt council? Do we read to enhance our self image? What we *should* be doing is reading to receive, to respond, to submit, to listen to God's voice so we can serve and humbly obey: *one step at a time*. But we want the full picture in a nice compact form...a google map from our current location to the destination all in front of me, and *in front of me in a moment*. We aren't really interested in the 'blue highways' of this life...the 'two-lane' journeys and the back-road explorations of not just *what*, but *why*, and *who*, and the art behind the backdrop. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth once said, "I have read many books, but the bible reads me." That's a Holy Spirit led walk with God and a time of worship not just a reading as duty! It is a journey of relationship and worship, not just one of hopefully obedience.

Because we tend to be vastly goal oriented we fail to experience the journey itself and thus fail to grasp the nuances that are only found there. So even if we make it to the destination, we could never give anyone else directions because we never looked out the window along the way to see how we got there. We generally just don't care how we get there, as long as we get there fast and cheap. So most of us are traveling our spiritual lives in center-seat-discount-coach...

On the flip side of this is the damage done to others. In their desire to please David and to take matters into their own hands (because after-all, they knew what was best!), these men committed murder and not only failed to please the king, it made Him so angry that he had them executed. How could they have been so terribly *...drastically*, wrong? They didn't just miss by a little, they missed by a mile! And the truth is, when we fail to truly patiently seek the King on matters of choice and direction, we can also miss by equal distance! When we fail to 'wait on the Lord' and "not lean on our own understanding", we can miss the mark by catastrophic distances. Those who do drone and missile war-craft, know that one has to carefully and patiently "fire once but measure three times." Because mistakes therein can be disastrous!

Often, it is not a sinful or even an ill-advised goal that is sought. It often isn't the destination that is bad nor is the objective overtly a problem. It is the methods. It is the *way* it was done that ultimately made a mess of things. I have witnessed such in relationships that were in a hurry and while they got to the wedding, today the marriage suffers because of how they got there. Folks who rushed into educational decisions, large financial investments, career moves, etc.

I knew a woman once who wanted to have children so badly that instead of planning, discussion, and preparation, she just secretly went off her birth control. So her and husband have kids now but they also have little if any marriage relationship left. The goal was fine. The method ruined it. I have seen people 'charge' and 'credit' themselves toward a business venture that was ill conceived and they whole thing fell apart. But the bills keep coming even now in the mail each and every month. Driving a car? *Fine*. Driving a car too fast? *Not so much*. Driving intoxicated? *People die and you go to jail*. The **goal** was innocuous. The method was **disastrous**.

I have watched people decide...or at least apparently decide, to move on from this fellowship in an instant. Some were Covenant members...a vow before God and all of this fellowship, that was broken in a heartbeat. They are quick to tell me that church isn't supposed to be a prison...or some such phrasing, and for the record we agree whole-heartedly! No more than marriage is, or salvation is, for those too are covenant promises and relationships, and ones that everyone seems quite willing to enter into without trepid fear of a life in prison! But it wasn't just that they were breaking their promise to us and God, it was what happened along the way as they bolted for the door. People were hurt, ministries damaged, relationships ruined, and trust was kicked to the curb. It was *how* they did it, far more than *what* they did! Even if their reason to depart was righteous!

The Scriptures are full of directions as to not only what to do and what not to do to live a Holy life in sight of God, but also pages of nuanced directions on how to execute God's directives and His commands. What's the problem here then? Why this vast chasm of ideology in issues that can often be seemingly minor in their perceived effect?

One, such can be the flesh manifested in lack of patience. A failure to "wait upon the Lord"(Isaiah 40:31) and to be "patiently establishing our hearts" in Christ (James 5:8) God it seems is never in a hurry. But Satan always seems to be!

Secondly, and *usually*, the issue in this matter is *pride*. The 'presentation' of Ish-bosheth's head to David clearly exposed a desire to personally and fabulously get the credit for this act. It was more than a humble passionate desire to see the greater kingdom rid of any forces that might conspire against God's choice for king...albeit, they didn't really even have *that* edict, but rather they made a big point of bringing the head to David and bragging about what a great act they had committed in order to gain prestige and position. If it was otherwise, it all would have been done quietly and anonymously! In other words, they were seeking to give the credit for this unrequested act to the King and to their nation so that they might appear to be something they were not, but in reality it was all a selfish motivation. It wasn't about David or about Israel...it was about *them*. It wasn't about God or obedience, It was all and totally about *them*.

We are often so motivated ourselves. We may try to put a spiritual spin on our actions but the way we conduct such is often a dead give-away that it is really only about us and our selfish desires. There is nothing Godly and spiritual about even a spiritual undertaking if we hurt people along the way. God is love. He doesn't burn down a village because he wants a fast delivery on a pizza. The truth is, no matter how we spin it, the *way* we do things is as important and "telling" to God's support or lack thereof, as anything we may ultimately accomplish and then hang our hat on. Remember, as God told Samuel back in chapter 16 of 1 Samuel concerning David himself..."the Lord sees the *heart of a man* and his actions, not just outward appearances."