UBF Message 2Sam 3 11/07/2021

Put God’s interest ahead of yours

2Samuel 3:6-39 Key verse 27

Now when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into an inner chamber, as if to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.”

What would you do if the final game in the world cup is on Sunday morning at 11 am? Would you skip worship service? Many times, our personal interests conflict with God’s interest. In today’s passage Abner came to David to unite Israel. However, Joab only thought about his own interest to avenge his brother; He did not think about the kingdom. He killed Abner and jeopardized the future of Israel. In today’s passage we will think about the importance of putting God’s kingdom ahead of our own interests.

1. Abner goes over to David (6-21)

Verse 1 states, “During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul.” This passage begins with Abner. We know about Abner from 1 Samuel. Who was Abner? He was a member of the royal family and the first cousin of Saul through his father Ner (1Sam 14:51). Ner and Saul were brothers. Abner was the most important military commander under both Saul and David. Saul’s various successful military campaigns were led by Abner. It was when David killed Goliath that Abner presented David to Saul (1Sam 17). While David was a fugitive, David rebuked Abner for failing to protect Saul while he was sleeping, allowing David to take Saul’s spear and water jug (1Sam 26:14). After King Saul’s death, it was a time of crisis, with Israel scattered and defeated. Without Abner, no Israelite kingdom would have continued in the north. As commander-in-chief of Saul’s armies, Abner could have taken the throne himself yet, he had enabled Ish-Bosheth retain his father’s throne. Abner’s task was difficult because the house of Saul was growing weaker while the house of David was growing stronger. The turning point came when in verse 7, the puppet king Ish-Bosheth accused him of illicit relations with Saul’s concubine Rizpah.

In a rage at Ish-Bosheth’s rebuke, Abner said in verses 8b-10, “Am I a dog’s head – on Judah’s side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven’t handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman! May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David’s throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.” Here “a dog’s head” means worthlessness. Abner was asking Ish-Bosheth, “Am I worthless to you?” To Abner, the matter of Rizpah is of little consequence compared to his service, and Ish-Bosheth demeaned that service. Abner seemed to believe in God’s promise that David would be a king over Israel. This may indicate the widespread recognition of divine favor attached to David and his future reign. Abner seemed to sense that David, by God’s sovereign will, would be king over Israel.

So, Abner arranged to yield the kingdom to David and bring an end to the house of Saul. Abner negotiated with David for the purpose of uniting all Israel under David’s kingship. David accepted his offer with one condition in verse 13, “I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to me.” Why did David demand Michal, although he had many wives? By being reunited with Michal, David wanted to let people know that he was married to the daughter of King Saul. By reclaiming his marriage to Michal, David wanted to emphasize the fact that he was a son-in- law of Saul, asserting that he has a legitimate claim to the throne of Israel. So, David said “daughter of Saul” instead of “my wife.”

Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said in verses 17-18, “For some time you have wanted to make David your king. Now do it! For the LORD promised David, ‘By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.’”

Abner and his men visited David in Hebron where final arrangements were carefully done. David prepared a feast for him and his men. Then Abner said to David in verse 21, “Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires,” So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

1. Joab murders Abner (22-39)

Joab enters the story, and events take a dark turn. Verses 22-23 states, “Just then David’s men and Joab returned from a raid and brought with them a great of plunder. When Joab and his men arrived, he was told that Abner had come to the king and that the king had sent him away and that he had gone in peace.” Who was Joab? Joab was the commander-in-chief of David’s army. He was the first cousin of David. His mother was Zeruiah, David’s younger sister. He had two younger brothers: Abishai and Asahel. Asahel was killed by Abner in battle as we learned from chapter 2.

So, Joab went to the king and said in verse 24b-25, “What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing.” He was angry at the fact that King David sent Abner in peace. He left David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern at Sirah. Joab took him aside into an inner chamber, as if to speak with him privately. And there, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and Abner died.

Joab was waiting for the day when he could kill Abner. When the time came, he killed Abner out of revenge. At the same time, he might also have killed Abner out of competition. He probably sensed that Abner could be commander-in-chief and he would become second in command once Israel was united. We also see Joab’s sense of competition later when David put Amasa as commander-in-chief in 2 Sam 19. Joab killed Amasa as well (2Sam 20:10).

Joab killed Abner because he thought about only his personal revenge. Joab did not think about the kingdom. Abner wanted to unite Israel under David. If Joab had not killed Abner, the kingdom of Israel would have been smoothly established under David along with many great soldiers like Joab and Abner, with fewer casualties. However, Joab put his personal agenda ahead of the kingdom. He should have thought about the kingdom.

We all have our own personal interests. Jesus also had his own personal interest. If he had fulfilled his personal interest, there would have been no kingdom of God on earth, and we would have been in hell. His personal interest was not to die for the sin of the world. A night before his death he asked God the Father, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me” (Mat 26:39a). Jesus wanted to live as a man. He did not want to die. Yet he knew God’s interest. He knew that God wanted him to die to establish His kingdom on earth. So, he sacrificed his personal interest and followed God’s. Because of his decision, God’s kingdom could be established here on earth for us.

Personal interests are important, and we should take care of them. However, we should put the kingdom first before our personal interests. Sometimes, we need to sacrifice our interest for the sake of the kingdom. Paul said in 2Tim 2:3-4, “Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs. But rather tries to please his commanding officer.” We should not get entangled in personal interests. We should follow God’s agenda. Jesus said in Mat 6:33, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” We should seek first God’s kingdom by following God’s interest. What is God’s interest? His interest is to build His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Our desire should be building His kingdom on earth with the Gospel of love.

Later, when David heard about Abner’s death, he said, “I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner. May his blood fall on the head of Joab and on his whole family! May Joab’s family never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food.” We know how angry David was by looking at his curse upon Joab. His curse was unusual because David cursed Joab and his family in five different ways: running sore, leprosy, injury in legs, death by the sword, and poverty. The end days of Joab were miserable. Just before David’s death David told his son Solomon to bring justice to Joab by killing him (1King 2:5-6). In the end Joab was killed.

David said to Joab and all the people with him in verses 31, “Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner.” King David himself walked behind the bier. They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner’s tomb. All the people wept also. The king sang this lament for Abner: ‘Should Abner have died as the lawless die? Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. You fell as one falls before the wicked.” And all the people wept over him again.

David was innocent, but it was also possible that no one would believe him. David’s claim of innocence was clearly a factor in the public mourning and funeral given for Abner. David probably sent a message to the northern tribes that this killing was not his desired outcome. Abner’s death seemed more of a problem to David than an asset.

David also had a genuine heart for Abner. David lamented over him. He fasted for Abner. He acknowledged Abner’s greatness by saying in verse 38, “Do you now realize that a commander and a great man has fallen in Israel this day?” David truly honored Abner. To honor a person is to acknowledge one’s worth. To honor others requires honoring oneself. One who does not honor oneself cannot honor others. The petty man cannot acknowledge other’s greatness. Only the great man can acknowledge other’s greatness. The text tells us that all the people took note and were pleased: indeed, everything the king did pleased them. So on that day all the people there and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.”

In conclusion, today we learned that we should not put our personal interests ahead of the kingdom. Many times, our personal interests may conflict with God’s interest. We tend to follow our own interest. But we learned that we should put God’s kingdom ahead of our own interests. Sometimes, we should sacrifice our personal agenda for the sake of the kingdom.

Lately, my personal interest is doing research in medicine. Doing research in medicine had been my interest. But I sacrificed it by not going to a fellowship after my pediatric training 20 years ago. However, this year my interest in doing research resurged. I found some topics to explore with my few PA and NP students in my clinic. In my heart, I like to do it. But I know that it is not beneficial for building God’s kingdom. While preparing this message, I again learned that I should follow God’s interest by putting my personal interests behind the kingdom.

What are your personal interests? Do your personal interests conflict with God’s? If it is, you need to realign your desire according to God’s kingdom. We should seek first his kingdom by following God’s interest.