

(2 Samuel) How to Love an Enemy

by David Guzik

David teaches us that loving our enemies and praying for them is a command of Jesus and is essential for our spiritual growth and maturity.

Duration: 29:04

Scripture: 1 Samuel 10:1, 2 Samuel 4:1, Psalm 27:14, Isaiah 42:4, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:11, James 1:22

Topics: "Loving Enemies", "Faithfulness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the events described in 2 Samuel chapter 4. The chapter begins with the news of Abner's death, which causes Saul's son to lose heart and troubles all of Israel. David, the servant of the Lord, responds to this distress by addressing two men named Rehab and Bana. The preacher emphasizes the importance of not being discouraged when serving God, contrasting it with the discouragement that comes from serving man. The sermon also introduces Mephibosheth, the grandson of King Saul, who becomes lame after his nurse drops him while fleeing.

Transcript

Let's open up to 2 Samuel, chapter 4, beginning here at verse 1. I'll just get right into it. We'll sort of set the stage and the context as we've read a little bit. 2 Samuel, chapter 4. And when Saul's son heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost heart and all Israel was troubled.

Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of troops. The name of the one was Banah, and the name of the other was Rehob, the sons of Rimah, the Barathite, the children of Benjamin. For Baroth was also part of Benjamin, because the Barathites fled to Gittam and have been sojourners there until this day.

The first few verses here of the chapter bring us before this man again who we've seen in the last several chapters. His name is Ish-boseth. Now, his name isn't mentioned in the first few verses here, but when it says in verse 1, Saul's son, that's who it means.

You see, Saul was the first king of Israel. And as the first king of Israel, he reigned over the nation, he ruled as a king, but he wasn't a good king, he wasn't a godly king, and he forsook the Lord. And before Saul died, many years before Saul died, God put his hand and an anointing upon a young man to be the next king of Israel.

His name was David. And so the next king was in place, though Saul didn't recognize it, and Saul didn't step down from the throne. Saul didn't stop being king until he died on the field of battle, on the slopes of Mount Gilboa.

Well, after Saul died, you would expect that the nation would say, well, here's this godly man, David, let's recognize him as king, let's lift him up to the throne over Israel. But only one out of the 12 tribes recognized David as king. That was the tribe of Judah.

The other 11 tribes went after an obscure son of Saul named Ish-boseth. Now, Ish-boseth is an interesting man. He seems to have been a weak man, an ungodly man, a carnal man, and he was propped up in the position of king by a military man named Abner.

Maybe you hear about it every once in a while in, for example, Latin American countries or just one area of the world where this isn't so unusual, where when there's a change in power between presidents, it's really the military that puts the next president or the next ruler into power. Well, that was the case here in Israel in the days of David and Ish-boseth. The military, led by this man Abner, put Ish-boseth in power.

And we get the feeling from the text, though we're not specifically told, that the reason why Abner enjoyed these relationships is because he could exercise his power through a weak man like Ish-boseth. Now, last week, we saw that Ish-boseth ran afoul of Abner. He offended him.

And Abner said, I'm going over to David's side. And so that's what Abner did. He left Ish-boseth, went over to David's side.

And for all of that, Abner was murdered. That's all a lot to get into. You can get the tape from last week if you need to get a little bit deeper into that.

But the bottom line is this. Is this military man, Abner, who had supported Ish-boseth, now he's gone. And there is no support under Ish-boseth anymore.

There's no support under Ish-boseth because he was never called by God. I mean, after all, who put him into the throne? Was it God? No, it was man. It was Abner.

Let me give you a principle, folks. When you're promoted by man, then man can cut you out. When you're promoted by God, then God alone can take you away out of that position.

If your heart is lifted up by man, then it can be crushed by man. If your heart's lifted up by God, then there's a place of peace and security there. Ish-boseth didn't have a calling of God.

He was only called by man. And when this man, Abner, fell away from his position, when he forsook Ish-boseth, and when he was murdered, there was no support for Ish-boseth anymore. And you could start numbering the days until he would be completely taken out of the way.

You see, Ish-boseth knew that he wasn't called of God. Therefore, verse 1, when Saul's son heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost heart. And all Israel was troubled.

You know, when you really know that you're called by God, you have the strength to not lose heart. Well, I'm not saying that discouragement won't come to you as an attack, but your heart won't settle on it because at the end, you'll come back to the decision of understanding. Listen, I'm called by God.

God has a purpose. God has a plan for my life. I'm not going to be discouraged.

I'm not going to lose heart. Not too long ago, I read in Isaiah chapter 42, verse 4, where it speaks about the servant of the Lord. In an ideal sense, it's talking about the Messiah, Jesus himself, but it really has application to everybody who's a servant of the Lord.

And one of the things that it says of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42 is it says he will not fail nor be discouraged. Well, when you're a servant of God, you don't have to be discouraged. You can serve him and serve him faithfully.

Now, when you're a servant of man, it's oftentimes very easy to get discouraged. So Ish-bosheth, propped up by man, had the prop cut away from underneath him. And so he's in distress.

And we have the ominous note of these two men. If you remember, they're mentioned here in verse 2. Banah and Rehab, these two men mentioned in verse 2. We'll meet up with them a little bit later in the text. Now, I want you to take a look at verse 4 because we have a bit of a contrast, sort of a similarity and a contrast bound up within each other.

Look at it here in verse 4. Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son who was lame in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened as she made haste to flee that he fell and became lame.

So his name was Mephibosheth. Well, here we're introduced to a fellow with a strange sounding name. I bet you're not looking up that one in the baby book.

Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth was the grandson of King Saul, and he was right in line for the throne because you know how it works in a royal family. You know, you have the king and then who's next in line for the throne? Well, the oldest son, the crown prince.

Well, who's next in line for the throne after that? It's the oldest son of the oldest son. And that's Mephibosheth. Oh, boy, I'm going to get confused saying that word here today, that name.

Anyway, Mephibosheth is sort of a heart tugging person here in the text, because what you have in the story of Mephibosheth is a man who's wounded by somebody else. You have a contrast here, you have two kinds of weakness. You have the weakness of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul mentioned in verse one.

He's weak because his trust was in man and that prop was cut away. There's nothing else for him to rely on. But then you have the weakness of Mephibosheth and Mephibosheth was weak because he had been wounded or hurt by somebody else.

Little boy, five years old at the time, and he hears that his grandfather, King Saul, is dead and his father, Jonathan, is dead and the nurse is worried. Maybe they're going to have one of those massacres where they wipe out the whole royal family. We've got to flee.

We've got to find a place of safety. And so she scoops up Mephibosheth and they're running out of the house. But something falls.

I don't know. Maybe she tripped. Maybe she dropped him.

But he fell. And it wasn't just a scraped knee. It was a dislocation, perhaps in the ankle or the knee or the hip or a break that didn't mend right.

Whatever it was, Mephibosheth was left lame. You know, when you're lame, you drag that around with you your whole life, don't you? It's not something you get over. So there's Mephibosheth dragging his leg behind him his whole life.

He's weak, but not from his own fault. This happened to him. He didn't ask for this.

So we see two kinds of weakness here, don't we? Maybe I should just say a quick word about that before we go on. You know, God can minister to both kinds of weakness. Maybe there's weakness and difficulty in your life today.

And let's be honest, it's your fault. Oh, I know you want to blame everybody else for it. I know, you know, well, it was him or her or the other thing or the circumstances or all the the conspiracy against you and all.

It's your fault and it's totally your fault. Can I say that God can minister to that kind of weakness? He can take your eyes off of yourself and give you a center to your life that's bigger than yourself. You know, you need to start living for something bigger than you.

And when your life has that center of Jesus Christ, when you no longer are a man centered or a self centered person, but now you're a Jesus centered person. What a difference. It doesn't matter if those props of men are knocked away.

You're supported by God. You're propped up by Jesus Christ. And when people say, well, it's just a crutch to you then.

Oh, no, Jesus isn't a crutch. He's a whole hospital for you. You know, and you're supported by him.

You know, man, that's a shaky crutch to lean on. It's going to break out from underneath you any minute now. But there's others of you and you're weakened in your life.

There's a sense of weakness and powerlessness in your life and defeat, perhaps. And honestly, the circumstances surrounding it, it's not your fault. You're like Mephibosheth.

You were dropped. It was an accident. It wasn't supposed to happen that way.

You're a victim of it all. God still can bless and redeem and pour out his grace upon the Mephibosheth among us, too. It doesn't really matter.

There's a sense in which it doesn't really matter if your need is your fault or something else that somebody else has brought upon you. Jesus Christ can meet your need today. Now, keep Mephibosheth in mind.

In coming weeks, we're going to come back to him and you're going to see one of the most tender and touching stories in the whole Bible about Mephibosheth. On to verse five. Forget about tender and touching.

That's the last you're going to see about it here in this chapter. Verse five. Then the sons of Rimmon, the Barathite, Rehob and Benaz sent out and came at about the heat of the day to the house of Mephibosheth, who was lying on his bed at noon.

So here's Mephibosheth taking a nap in the afternoon. Maybe he was a lazy man. Maybe it was just sort of customary in that culture.

You know, sort of the siesta in the middle of the day. We really don't know. But here's Mephibosheth sleeping in the middle of the day.

And what happens? Verse six. And they came there all the way into the house as those to get some wheat. And they stabbed him in the stomach.

Then Rehab and Benaz, his brother, escaped. For when they came into the house, he was lying on his bed in his bedroom. And then they struck him and killed him, beheaded him and took his head.

And we're all night escaping through the plane. Let's be happy that sometimes we don't have the visual Bible right in front of us. You know, they didn't have surgically sharp instruments.

It probably wasn't a quick stroke or two to get that head off. You say, why? Well, to them, it was very important. It's not easy to hack a man's head off, I would suppose.

And they needed to do it because they wanted to take that head to David as a trophy and said, this man was your enemy and we killed him. Where's our reward? Should I just remind you again of the political situation? One tribe, the tribe of Judah, recognizes David as king. Eleven other tribes recognize Ishbosheth as king.

There's two rival kings over the people of God. One's an anointed king of God. The other is a pretender to the throne.

One should be there. One shouldn't be there. And friends, the one who shouldn't be there just got dead.

Let's take a look. Verse eight. And they brought the head of Ishbosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life.

And the Lord has avenged my Lord, the king this day of Saul and his descendants. Oh, they thought they'd score big points, right? David, this is the man who was the rival king. This was the man who troubled you.

He's dead now. We can prove it. And they hold up his bloody head before David.

I imagine that as David saw this and heard these words, I imagine that he got sick to his stomach. Nauseous, felt like throwing up. And I tell you, he did not get sick to his stomach because there was a severed head right in front of him.

That was nothing to David. David knew about severed heads. He cut the head off of Goliath and that was a big head.

When David killed Goliath, he hacked off his head and he carried it around with him as a trophy. He went up to King Saul. Look what I did.

It was like his reward, his trophy. It wasn't the severed head that grossed David out. It was the wickedness of these men.

Two things, I think, especially display their wickedness. First of all, it's their phony religious talk. Did you see it there in verse 8? Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life.

And the Lord has avenged my Lord, the king this day of Saul and his descendants. Oh, we're messengers of God, David. We're servants of the Lord.

And here is the Lord's righteous judgment upon Ishbosheth. Yes, isn't God good? And it's sickened, David. Because these men were rank murderers, as David will say in a few moments.

I don't want to get too far ahead of myself, but I just want to say they're covering up their horrible crime with all this religious talk. Kind of turns my stomach when I hear it, too. You know, we just need to be real.

And not spew out the religious blah, blah, blah. If our hearts and lives aren't up to it. And David heard this, he said, you guys aren't messengers of God at all.

The Lord this, the Lord that. You did it for one reason. You were hoping I would give you money and fame and maybe a position in my army.

That's why you did this. Now, the second reason why I think David might have been nauseated by the words of these men is because they use a phrase here about Saul. Did you see it in verse eight? The son of Saul, your enemy.

Now, do you remember when we were in the first chapter of Second Samuel and David received the news that Saul and Jonathan had died in battle on the slopes of Mount Gilboa? And when David heard the news, he didn't say, you know, ding dong, the witch is dead. This man who's been trying to kill me for years now, he's dead. He got his.

David wept. David mourned. David composed a song of beautiful tribute to Saul that overlooked Saul's many glaring faults and praised whatever good David could find in him.

That song, David's response to Saul's death shows that David did not regard Saul as an enemy. Now, if I were to talk to you objectively about it and take a step back from the situation, I would say objectively speaking, Saul was David's enemy. Saul was out to kill David.

Saul did hate David. Saul did try to do everything he could to destroy the man objectively. So especially you would say that Saul was an enemy to David, but David refused to regard Saul as an enemy.

Instead, David did what the much greater son of David told every one of us to do in the sermon on the Mount. He said, love your enemies. Pray for those who spitefully use you.

Do you remember what Jesus said in that sermon on the Mount? He said, oh, you love those who love you. Big deal. Who cares? Everybody does that.

Those all know the love of God is demonstrated when you love those who hate you. And David did. You know, when they said those words, Saul, your enemy, David, I don't know who you're talking about.

David said, Saul, my enemy. I don't know. Saul, my enemy.

I know Saul who used to be the king. I know the Saul that I served, tried to serve the best I could. I know the Saul that I was grieved at when he died.

Saul, my enemy. I don't know who you're talking about. Shows what a difference there was between the heart of David and the heart of these men.

And and maybe I just need to take a point out here and press it home. How do you regard people who are like enemies to you in your life? Oh, you have them right now, as I'm saying this, some faces are popping into your mind just as you're sitting there right now, and I don't know, maybe they would think of themselves as enemies against you. Maybe they wouldn't.

Maybe they're enemies on purpose. Maybe they're enemies on accident. I don't know.

But I want to know, are you loving them? Are you praying for them? Why don't you start there? Pray for your enemies, pray for those people in your life that you just can't stand the people you don't want to be around. You start praying for them. And no, not the kind of Lord, you know, destroy them, God, please.

Not that kind of prayer. How about this? God bless them. You say, well, no, I can't pray.

God bless them because they're in sin and they're all wrong. And of course, everybody who's, you know, having a hard time with us, they're obviously in sin, right? Oh, so, Lord, they're so in sin. I can't pray.

Bless it. Well, yes, you can, because for God to bless them would be to bring them to repentance. That is the blessing in their life.

Just ask God to bless them, to pour out a spirit upon them, and maybe the work of the spirit in their life will be to bring them to repentance. Maybe it'll be to convict them about that sinful thing in their life. Maybe you'll be to bring them to reconciliation with you.

Maybe not. Why not just start praying for them that God would bless them? You're going to have people like this in your life. Some of them are your fault.

Some of them are people that you have made your enemies. Some of them, they're not your fault at all. You're like Mephibosheth, right? It just sort of happened.

And maybe some of them are fellow believers. Maybe some of it happened just from the normal friction that happens as Christians live together. You know, there's a certain measure of that friction that's just normal.

Why do you think Paul said in all of his letters, so many of his letters, forgive one another, be long suffering towards one another, compassionate towards one another. Why? Because there's a need for that among believers. It's not strange.

It's not weird. There's just a normal friction of rubbing against each other that happens. That's why we need to have a lot of grace and mercy and love and forgiveness and long suffering towards one another.

But you know, the faces that are popping up in your mind as I'm saying this, you know, before you leave here this morning, you're going to have to make a decision. Am I going to be a hearer of the word or a doer of the word? Say, God, what do you want me to do with these lives? Well, in any regard, let's see what David did with these fellows. Verse nine.

Then David answered his brother, the sons of Ramon the Barathite, and said to them, as the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all adversity. And now we're expecting, you know, these guys have big smiles on their face. Yes.

You know, this is what we've been waiting for. Verse 10. When someone told me saying, look, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good news.

I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag. The one who thought I would give him a reward for his news. The smile just fell from these fellows faces.

Verse 11. How much more when wicked men have killed a righteous person in his own house on his bed? Therefore, shall I not require his blood at your hand and remove you from the earth? So David commanded his young men and they executed them, cut off their hands and feet and hanged them by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of this and buried it in the tomb of Abner in Hebron.

On the one hand, you say, David, you're a cruel man. Maybe these guys deserved execution, but mutilating their bodies, you know, hanging their dead corpses out on walls, everybody could see you're just vindictive. No, David was not.

Not at all. There was a very important reason why David did this. Friends, there was such a strong tradition in the ancient world.

And I'm not talking about very far ancient. But a very strong condition that when one dynasty replaces another dynasty, the first thing that the new dynasty does is it kills everybody from the old dynasty. Everybody.

Under that kind of thinking, under those kind of rules, everybody who was ever a genetic descendant of Saul would be murdered. Sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, cousins, it doesn't matter. You're related to Saul.

You're dead because we don't want anybody to challenge the new dynasty. David, in doing this dramatic act of execution against these men and making it as public as possible, he let everybody know hands off the house of Saul. Nobody is going to operate with business as usual, where everybody wipes out people from the previous dynasty.

No. See, friends, because of this custom in the ancient world, Saul made an unusual request of David. Of course, when Saul was still alive.

Do you remember those incidents where David had the opportunity to kill Saul and he didn't? You know, at one of those opportunities that there's Saul and he's so humiliated because David has had every opportunity to cut off Saul's head. But he didn't. And Saul's repentance for a few moments, at least, and he's weeping before David.

David, my son, you're more righteous than I am. And he says, David, make me one promise. When you come to the throne, please don't wipe out all my descendants.

David said, I promise. David's making good on that promise right now. I think we have such a tremendous example in front of us of how to deal with enemies.

But I don't want to just have David as our example. Can I bring it back in conclusion to another example to you? How the Lord has dealt with you? You know, every one of us start out as enemies of God. You say, well, no, I'm not an enemy of God.

I mean, I'm not a Christian, but I'm not an enemy of God. I just want God to leave me alone. You know, he does his thing.

I'll do my thing. That's fine. You know, that's expressing hatred towards somebody.

Sometimes the most hateful thing you can do to another person is ignore them. That's how a lot of people express their hatred of God. They ignore him completely.

You know, even when we hated God, he loved us. Jesus cared about us. Jesus prayed for us.

Jesus died for us. Jesus made the way for us to be reconciled to him. Now, if you've never taken advantage of that, that's what you must do this morning.

You must say, God, I'm not going to ignore you anymore. I'm not going to set myself aside for you. I'm going to come to you.

Some of you, you have, but this area of dealing with your enemies, it's a huge struggle in your life. God's brought you here this morning to set you free from it. God's brought you here this morning.

Those faces that flashed upon your mind, you can say, Lord, I'm going to pray for them. I'm going to forgive them and I'll trust God that you will open up the doors towards a reconciliation. I'm going to love them in any way that I can.

Oh, to be set free from that, to have that obstacle that's blocking your relationship with the Lord, because don't kid yourself, that bitterness, that hatred, that unforgiveness that you have towards that other person, it's blocking your relationship with God. So let the Lord take it out of the way. He can do it as we seek him together this morning.

Let's let's pray towards that end. Father, I pray this morning, Lord, first for anybody who, well, Lord, they need to make peace with you. Maybe they've been in open opposition to you.

Maybe they've been in silent opposition to you, Lord. Either way, I pray that you would end that opposition and warm hearts towards you this morning. Father, I also pray for every one of us who deal with enemies, so to speak.

God, we perhaps didn't call them that, but Lord, we just want to be free in Jesus, free from the tyranny of bitterness and and unforgiveness and pain of the past. And Lord, just to love you and to love others and to be like Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for loving us and dying on the cross for us, even when we didn't care about you at all.

But you did it, Lord. Help us to have that same kind of love for people, no matter how they are towards us. God, we love you and praise you.

Thank you for the goodness and the power of your word. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

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