

Walking Wisely – 2 Samuel 21:1-14

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read Ephesians 5:8-21

B. Today's Study

1. As we near the end of David's story, we come to a difficult passage.
2. It's a story hard for us to relate to because it's based in a *view of justice* & on *customs* foreign to us.
3. Despite that, there are still some important lessons for us today.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, "It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites." ²So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

1. Roughly 500 years before this, during Israel's Conquest of Canaan, the Gibeonites had *tricked* them into a peace treaty.
 - a. Though they lived just a few miles from where Israel was camped, in the center of the Promised Land,
 - b. They dressed up in tattered clothes & took stale food that made it look like they'd traveled a great distance.
 - c. Then they went to Joshua saying they lived far away. They said reports of God's great power had reached them & they wanted to forge an alliance.
 - d. Joshua bought their story & cut a deal.
 - e. Just days later, Israel realized they'd been tricked when they marched into the Gibeonite territory.
2. Joshua realized his error was in not seeking God *first* about whether or not to make the treaty. Once made – God held Israel to their word; they were to *protect* the Gibeonites, though they were made *perpetual indentured servants* to Israel.
3. 500 years later, when Saul came to Israel's throne as her first king, he *attacked* the weak & defenseless Gibeonites.
 - a. Saul was a *coward*. The prophet Samuel told Saul his *main task* was to secure Israel's borders.
 - b. But he repeatedly *balked* at taking on Israel's biggest threat, the powerful Philistines.
 - c. The powerless Gibeonites made an easier target, so he went after them.
 - d. This would be like the Oxnard Police, instead of dealing with the Chiques, going to a local park & beating up a T-ball team.
4. What Saul did was wrong! V. 2 says he did it out of *zeal* for Israel, but it was

misplaced zeal.

- a. He knew he was supposed to secure Israel's borders & take possession of the land God had promised, but he never sought God about **HOW** he was to do that.
 - b. Saul was like many—knowing they *ought* to live a certain way – but never really looking to God to find out how; never looking to His Word to discover His will.
 - c. He knew Samuel had said he was to fight Israel's enemies, but he set out to do so in his own wisdom & strength.
 - d. Thinking the mighty Philistines too big a challenge, Saul channeled his zeal into wiping out the defenseless Gibeonites – people he never ought to have gone after in the first place.
 - e. And IF HE'D READ GOD'S WORD, **HE WOULD HAVE KNOWN IT!**
5. **Listen:** *Zeal* is great! *Zeal* in performing the call of God on our lives is *wonderful*.
- a. In Revelation 3, Jesus said being *lukewarm* is terrible. He wants us hot/zealous for Him.
 - b. But zeal for zeal's sake is dangerous! Zeal *without knowledge* is a disaster.
 - c. In Romans 10, Paul warns of the zeal of those who are *religious* but reject Christ.
6. History has seen *too much* religious zeal unshaped by a Knowledge of God.
- a. Such zeal moved the Pharisees & priests to condemn Jesus.
 - b. It drove the followers of Mohammad across the Middle East & Mediterranean with bloody swords.
 - c. It moved Europe in the Middle Ages to take back those areas in the Crusades.
 - d. It isn't just Jews & Christians who've been moved by a *religious but ungodly zeal*.
 - 1) The Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, & Greeks all had a strong sense of *divine mission*.
 - 2) Rome's armies marched in the belief they were on a religious quest.
 - 3) In the modern era, *Communism*, which has been responsible for the deaths of *hundreds of millions*, was spread by *zealous* revolutionaries whose *religious creed* was an angry & aggressive secular humanism.
 - 4) Al Qaeda & the other jihadists are driven by a fervent & misguided religious zeal.
7. Saul's zeal in attacking Gibeon was nothing less than criminal. There was no excuse for it because he *ought* to have known better – it was right there in God's Word. But he'd neglected it.
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8. Sad to say, there are portions of the Body of Christ today *repeating* Saul's error.
- a. They find things in the culture & nation that are wrong, and launch a *crusade* to oppose it.
 - b. They make posters & go out on the street to express their opposition to this or that.
 - 1) They call down the *wrath of God* on those they find offensive.

- 2) Though Jesus died to save sinners from hell, they slogans would gladly confine the objects of their anger there.
 - c. Their message is very different from what Jesus called His followers to share.
 - d. One day, as Jesus & the boys were passing by a village, some people came out & told them they weren't welcome.
 - 1) James & John took offense for Jesus' sake & asked for permission to call down fire from heaven to wipe the village out.
 - 2) Jesus **rebuked** them & said they needed to understand they were **not** to possess a judgmental & condemning spirit, one that delights in calling down God's wrath.
 - 3) Rather - their message was one of forgiveness & reconciliation for those who repent.
 - e. Yet today we have people who call themselves Christians, holding up signs saying this or that group **ought** to burn in hell.
 - f. They're zealous, but it's not **holy zeal** – it's Saul's zeal & it's doing great harm, just as his did.
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9. Saul's error in killing the Gibeonites resulted in 3 years of famine.
10. But notice that it didn't come until **long after** Saul was gone & David was reigning.
 - a. The reason judgment was delayed is because God is **merciful** & was **waiting to see** if action would be taken to redress Saul's crime.
 - b. When after years it wasn't, famine settled over the land.
11. Unlike Saul, David had read God's Word.
 - a. He knew Moses had said the king was to write his own copy of the law
 - b. And read it often so he'd possess the wisdom to rule & live well.
12. David knew God had promised blessings would flow if Israel obeyed Him.
13. But if they disobeyed, trials would prevail; famine being one of the most **obvious** evidences of God's judgment.
14. So David prayed & asked God what the **root cause** of the famine was; where had Israel strayed.
15. God sent word to David, probably through either the prophet Gad or Nathan, that the cause of the famine was the injustice Saul had perpetrated on the Gibeonites.
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16. There's an important lesson here: When a famine troubled Israel, David diagnosed Israel's problem as **spiritual** & asked God for wisdom to deal with it.
 - a. David didn't see famine as the root problem; it was a **symptom**.
 - b. He knew ending the famine would not come through passing new laws or enacting new farming techniques.
 - c. It would come from dealing with the real problem the famine was merely a symptom of.
17. Having learned the cause was the unanswered crime of Saul's campaign against Gibeon, David set about to **make things right**.
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18. Revelation shows us the End Times are going to be marked by global physical judgments on a Christ-rejecting World.

- a. Famine, pestilence & plague are going to be far-reaching & intense.
 - b. The *root cause* will be *spiritual* – Humanity rejects God.
19. It shouldn't strike us as odd then that such things as famine & pestilence are signs of God's judgment on nations *today*.
- a. As we've so often observed, while God judges individuals in the realm of eternity,
 - b. Nations only exist in the here & now, so God deals with them within the course or history.
 - c. They rise & fall according to the outworking of His will.
 - d. So when famine or plague strikes, we must be wise about how we respond.
 - e. God may be using such trials to break the leaders of their sin & call the nation to repentance.
20. Some years ago we were shown images of thousands of starving people in Ethiopia & Sudan.
- a. A long drought destroyed the crops.
 - b. Civil War misplaced millions, further adding to the problem.
 - c. A famine of epic proportion threatened the entire region.
 - d. What we never hear is that *prior* to the drought, the Communists took over in Ethiopia while Radical Muslims took over in Sudan, from strongly pro-Christian leaders.
 - e. Then both nations embarked on a campaign of *genocide* in attempting to wipe out believers.
21. Is it possible famine was judgment on God-rejecting regimes for their crimes & sin?
22. The nations of the world rallied to aid the plight of the famine stricken regions.
- a. But you know what happened to much of the aid?
 - b. Because it was given to the *governments* of Ethiopia & Sudan, they warehoused & sold it, rather than giving it to those in need, the profits lined the pockets of wicked men.
 - c. A few relief organizations took in aid *covertly*, by-passing the official channels altogether.
 - d. And now years later, the leaders of these organizations are finding an open door & invitation to high ranking government officials in Ethiopia & Sudan, to speak as *advocates* for the weak & needy.
 - e. These organizations have *proven* their integrity & corrupt officials are mystified why they would risk their lives to take food & relief to people who could never pay them back or do anything for them.
23. These boxes you see here are more than gifts for kids. Because SP *puts them* into the hands of needy children, they open a door to officials who possess the power to bring real change & help for their people. I've seen it first hand with the boxes we've taken into the Russian Far East.
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24. This is where the idea of *walking wisely* comes in to today's study.
- a. We need to respond to the challenges & opportunities around us *wisely & prayerfully*.
 - b. We see a need & our immediate reaction is to help.
 - c. We must first *ask* if the need is the work of God in correcting something

- that's wrong.
- d. We must make sure our aid isn't only *facilitating more sin*, or allowing someone to *escape* the *result* of *their* actions.
 - e. Our aid, must *really help the needy*, not just make us feel better because we gave.

B. Vs. 3-6

³Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?" ⁴And the Gibeonites said to him, "We will have no silver or gold from Saul or from his house, nor shall you kill any man in Israel for us." So he said, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

1. As the king, David was immune from the effects of a famine.
2. But he understood his role as the king to be the defender of the weak, poor, & powerless; the ones who would be most harmed.
3. He moved to see the famine ended by addressing the root cause; the injustice the Gibeonites had suffered at Saul's hand.
4. Saul's campaign against them had been at least 40 years before. But they didn't want monetary compensation.
5. Nor were they interested in executing the soldiers Saul had used to carry out his order of genocide.
6. So, David asked, "What then **DO** you want?"

⁵Then they answered the king, "As for the man who consumed us and plotted against us, *that* we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the territories of Israel, ⁶let seven men of his descendants be delivered to us, and we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, *whom* the LORD chose." And the king said, "I will give *them*."

7. They asked for 7 of Saul's descendants to be executed.
8. Note that in v. 6 they said they would do this "before the LORD." They saw this as the just punishment for the crime Saul had committed.
9. This seems *unfair* to us. Why execute a man's descendants for his crime?
 - a. If you harm me, *my grandkids* aren't going to feel some right to take it out on *your grandkids*.
 - b. But our culture isn't based on the same values & customs as the one we're reading about here.
 - c. In *that* culture, the tribe, clan, & family was *everything*.
 - 1) If you did something to one person in a family, you did it to *all* of them.
 - 2) They had long memories. A wrong suffered in one generation was remembered decades later.
 - 3) So it wasn't uncommon for *feuds* to last for generations.
 - 4) They only ended when both families *agreed* enough pain had been suffered.
10. The Gibeonites had an unsettled score with Saul's family – one *God saw* as needing resolution.
 - a. A crime had been committed. Innocent blood had been shed.

- b. The law required punishment, resolution.
 - c. The Gibeonites said the death of 7 of Saul's descendants would settle the matter.
11. In doing this, both the Gibeonites & David were moved by Numbers 35:33 which says –
- You shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.**
12. Saul's descendants carried his blood & since real justice, not just revenge was the motivation behind all this – we can safely assume these 7 had in some way been at the center of Saul's campaign.
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C. Vs. 7-9

⁷But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the LORD'S oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. ⁸So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; ⁹and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before the LORD. So they fell, *all* seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.

1. David delivered 7 of Saul's grandsons to the Gibeonites, who in a carefully conducted public execution, put them to death by hanging.
 2. There was no torment or torture involved. They were *executed*, as it says in v. 9 "before the LORD" meaning it was done with respect for the Lord, not to gloat over the victims.
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3. The writer gives us a time marker in v. 9 so we'll better understand what comes next.

D. Vs. 10-14

¹⁰Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.

1. The Gibeonites wanted to make sure everyone was convinced Saul's crime had been paid for, so they left the bodies on public display.
2. Rizpah was one of Saul's concubines & the mother of 2 of the guys who'd been executed.
3. When she learned the bodies were going to be left on display, she set up a little camp near them & kept the scavengers from defiling them.
4. Her only concern was to protect the dignity of her sons until they could be properly interred.
5. You see, this whole sad affair would not really be over till the bodies were properly buried.
6. Rizpah's vigil went on for a couple weeks then David was told the bodies were

still exposed & she was still standing guard, braving the elements day after day.

11 And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. **12** Then David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh Gilead who had stolen them from the street of Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, after the Philistines had struck down Saul in Gilboa. **13** So he brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged. **14** They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the tomb of Kish his father. So they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.

7. Once the execution was completed, David returned to Jerusalem & prayed for an end to the drought that had brought the famine. *Nothing happened.*
8. A couple weeks later, when he heard the bodies of Saul's grandsons were unburied, he understood why the rains still hadn't fallen. Justice had been served to Gibeonites, but not Saul's house.
9. As long as they hung there in public, the *finality* of their death was incomplete..
10. A person isn't reckoned as dead & *gone* until burial.
 - a. When they die, we grieve.
 - b. The time *between* death & burial is a time of *adjustment*, when we wrestle with the reality of loss.
 - c. Burial is the postscript, the *finalizing* of a life.
11. The last act David had to perform for Saul's family was to bury them.
 - a. And as he thought about it, he realized both Saul & Jonathan weren't in their proper resting place.
 - b. In that culture, tied as it was to their ancestral lands, given them by no one less than God Himself, *families were buried together.*
 - c. When someone died, they wanted to be "gathered to their fathers" as it was said.
12. So David sent a crew to dig up the bones of Saul & Jonathan from the Jabesh Gilead where they'd been for over 30 years.
13. Along with the bodies of his 7 grandsons, they were given a *proper burial* in the family tomb at Saul's hometown of Gibeah.
14. It was then, that the long-desired rains came, ending the famine that had parched the land for 3 years.

III. CONCLUSION

A. "Finish This!"

1. The famine couldn't end until obedience was *complete* & the men were buried properly.
2. The rains came when the tomb was sealed. What a lesson for us. -
3. With the execution complete, David went home thinking everything would be fine. It wasn't.
4. The report of Rizpah's guard over the bodies woke David to the reality there

was *more yet to do*.

5. Rizpah's presence at the place of execution was like a huge sign saying, **"Finish This!"**

6. God is not impressed with our *half-way obedience*.
 - a. He's not content with our never-followed-through with *intentions*.
 - b. He's not so desperate for us to get it right that He'll compromise or negotiate with our partial compliance.
 - c. His commands are for *our* good, *our* blessing, *our* benefit, *not His*.
 - d. So He can't just wave away our failure to follow through on whole-hearted obedience!
7. I taught US history at the local Christian school some years ago.
 - a. Every so often, students would turn in incomplete assignments.
 - b. They'd do 5 out of 10 questions; or half the assignments.
 - c. I had them do a major term paper the last semester, with several steps they were to take every few weeks to make sure they were on track.
 - d. A couple of them completed the weekly assignments, but failed to turn in a term paper. Another turned in a term paper, but hadn't completed a single prior assignment.
 - e. Can you guess what their grade was? F: for "Fail".
8. I made it *crystal* on Day 1 what I expected in the way of homework, assignments, the term paper, and how each part would *weigh* on their final grade. It was all in writing, in their class syllabus. They could refer to it any time they wanted.
9. It was amazing how many heard what I said, saw it in black & white, but decided to go about the class the way they wanted to, *expecting me to bend to their wishes*.
10. The classroom doesn't work that way *& neither does life*.
11. God has told us how to live, what the rules are, what He expects.
12. Partial obedience doesn't impress Him. He's not bought off by a half-way performance.
13. He longs to shower us with blessing, but He *can't* bless the undevoted & unyielded,