

Sermon Given by

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## 2 Samuel 10 - "Foreign Folly"

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It's been quite a while since we were in 2 Samuel; I think it was last October that we got to chapter 9 so I want to start with a quick re-cap. David had been anointed by Samuel way back in 1 Sam 16. Still in his teens he had become famous overnight after toppling Goliath, the man-mountain, God-defying Philistine. Then life had become very tough for David as King Saul repeatedly tried to kill him. 2 Samuel starts though with David hearing the news that Saul had died in battle on Mount Gilboa. David is crowned king over Judah and there follows a civil war between the house of David and the house of Saul. David gets the upper hand; so we read in 3:1 **"David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker."** Until at the start of 2 Sam 5 the civil war ends and David is anointed for a third time as King over all Israel. His reign starts brilliantly – he brings the Ark into Jerusalem - symbolic of how he wants God to be central. In Chapter 8 we see David's power over his enemies and twice we hear the refrain: **"The Lord gave David victory wherever he went."** Then chapter 9 tells the story of David's loyalty and loving kindness as he showers mercy and generosity upon Mephibosheth the crippled son of his dear friend Jonathan, Saul's son. So whereas it was common in those days for the new king to wipe out the relatives of the former king, David welcomes Mephibosheth to Jerusalem and gives him a place to eat at his table. And it's that loving kindness of David that links chapter 9 to the start of chapter 10 but whereas Mephibosheth had received it, the Ammonites foolishly reject it. So we could sum up chapter 10 as the folly of rejecting God's anointed One.

Often in life acts of kindness are rejected with hostility. So I heard the other day of a successful plastic surgeon in the States, who in his retirement, decided to use his skills to help the residents in a poor district of his city who couldn't afford his services. He worked as hard in retirement as he had in regular practice. Yet after reconstructing a woman's face, she sued him. Her "before" and "after" pictures revealed remarkable improvement. Yet because the woman and her lawyers felt the doctor could have made her more beautiful than he did, they repaid his kindness with a lawsuit. Well in 2 Samuel 10 King David's loving kindness is met with rejection and humiliation. That's our first heading **David's Kindness Scored**

V1 ***"In the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him as king. David thought, "I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me." So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father. When David's men came to the land of the Ammonites, the Ammonite nobles said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think David is honouring your father by sending men to you to express sympathy? Hasn't David sent them to you to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?" So Hanun seized David's men, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away. When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men, for they were greatly humiliated. The king said, "Stay at Jericho till your beards have grown, and then come back."***

We're not told how Nahash the former King of the Ammonites had helped David – perhaps he came to his aid when Saul was tracking him down but whatever he had done David owed kindness to Nahash and expresses it towards Hanun his son. So David sends some diplomats to convey condolences to Hanun over his father's death. OK it wasn't as if David cried himself to sleep over Nahash's demise; and doubtless there was a good degree of formality involved. Yet it was a nice touch – an overt act of tribute for a departed leader. Even for all the formality it should have been recognised as a gracious formality and acknowledged with courtesy. Instead King Hanun makes the mistake of listening to his advisors and so responds to David's kindness with a shameful insult. In those days a beard was very much a sign of a man's masculinity. To mess with a guy's beard was a serious offence! And for an idea of the garments they were sent away in – do you know what I think comes near to the indecency of their robes – a modern day hospital gown! Very exposing and humiliating! David kindness is met with scorn and rejection.

And as it was for those representatives of King David so representatives of King David's Greater Son, the Lord Jesus, shouldn't be surprised when our loving efforts are met with derision or hostility. Yes, it's painful and disappointing but it shouldn't surprise us! Alexander Mackay had studied literature, mathematics and engineering at Edinburgh University where he specialized as a draftsman and surveyor. After graduation he turned down a lucrative position in the UK to become a pioneer missionary in Uganda. In order to reach Lake Victoria, Mackay had to construct a 230 mile stretch of road. When he arrived, he began teaching the Ugandans how to read and write. King Mtesa, the chief of the district was very pleased with Mackay and protected him. But later when Mwanga succeeded Mtesa persecution broke out and Mackay was repeatedly flogged. After his third flogging he was presumed dead and his bleeding body was left for wild animals to devour. The kindness and sacrifice of this devoted missionary was rewarded with callous indifference by those who had benefitted so greatly from him.

Of course the supreme example of kindness being rejected is when God sent his Son into the world. He came in love and kindness to bring blessing to the world and yet we read in John 1:10 ***“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”*** Like the diplomats in 2 Sam 10, his loving kindness was met with mockery – they put a robe on him and a crown of thorns on his head and they tortured him to death. So to Christians here tonight whilst I don't want to downplay the pain that can be caused by the sneering and rejection that we receive now and then as we seek to live and tell the gospel and it is horrible and upsetting but we shouldn't be surprised by it nor should we necessarily conclude from it that we're doing anything wrong. It is a loving thing to live out and tell out our faith even if it is not always received as such. And to the unbeliever here tonight can I urge you not to dismiss the supreme act of loving kindness shown by God in sending His Son to die on the Cross and rise again so that you may be forgiven. Don't be like King Hanun who in treating the delegation as he did scorned David, God's anointed one. Perhaps like King Hanun, you've been swayed and influenced to this point by the opinions of others; some talk by an atheist you heard back at school or a TV documentary you saw. Don't be swayed by the views of others – check out the facts for yourself. Because 2 Samuel 10 warns us that the most foolish and costly mistake any person can make is to wilfully ignore and reject God's kindness and grace in the Lord Jesus. The rest of the chapter underlines this.

Our second heading is **The Folly of attacking God's anointed One** What we have in the rest of the chapter is a regionalized version of Psalm 2. In Psalm 2 we read ***"The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One..."*** And this is what happens on a local scale in 2 Sam 10. V6, the Ammonites realise they have caused one huge stink and in no time at all v8 happens: ***"The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle formation at the entrance to their city gate, while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country."*** Back to Psalm 2 - what does God say to His Anointed one as the kings of the earth take their stand? He says Psalm 2:9 ***"You will rule them with an iron sceptre and dash them to pieces like pottery."*** And sure enough that's exactly what happens in 2 Samuel 10. So v13 ***"Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him..."*** Fast forward to v15 ***"After the Arameans saw that they had been routed by Israel, they regrouped."*** They stupidly come back for more. Let's pick up the action at v17: ***"When David was told of this, he gathered all Israel, crossed the Jordan and went to Helam. The Arameans formed their battle lines to meet David and fought against him. But they fled before Israel, and David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand of their foot soldiers. He also struck down Shobach the commander of their army, and he died there. When all the kings who were vassals of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with the Israelites and became subject to them..."***

Psalm 2:10 applies all this. The Psalmist writes: ***"Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him."*** The Ammonites may have been laughing at King David and their treatment of him at the start of 2 Sam 10 but they weren't laughing at the end. It may seem to some and perhaps to somebody here a small thing to mock Christianity or just to quietly and politely reject the claims of Jesus but it's anything but a small thing. If we choose to reject Christ as Saviour and Lord we will finally face him as Judge and that will be terrifying.

The third and final thing I want to draw out from this passage is the **Unexpected theology** of Joab, Israel's General. From what we know of Joab, we're not surprised when we see his military nous and strategy in action in v9-10. The narrator though doesn't seem so concerned with the military details. It's not like a war movie; he simply says that the Arameans fled v13 and what about the Ammonites? Well they figured that what was good for Aram was good for Ammon, so v14, they fled too. The writer may stifle details of battle but what he does do is give ample space for Joab's speech to his brother Abishai. I'll read it out v11 ***"Joab said, 'If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you. Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight.'*** It's a great speech and it's the only mention of God in the chapter and yet it comes from the lips of the iron-nerved, hard-bitten, vindictive Joab. But even if in the past Joab has displayed certain thug-like characteristics, in the final sentence of his speech he has much to teach us. Can you see that, v12, it is simple but wonderful theology and it is always the resting-place of God's beleaguered people: ***"The LORD will do what is good in his sight."***

This is any believer's comfort and peace in all of life's uncertainties. There are many things that God does promise to us and it's right that we put our all on those promises and pray them in with confidence. So for example in John 6:37 Jesus says: **"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."** That's something we can be certain about. So if someone says "But you don't know what I'm really like – Jesus would never have me as his follower." We can point them to that promise and reassure them. Or in Hebrews 13:5 God says to us: **"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** That's something we rely on and know with absolute certainty because God is true to his word. But there are other things that God doesn't promise. It doesn't mean that he can't do them or hasn't done them in the past and now and again today but he doesn't promise to. So for example God could heal my knee just like that if he wanted to. I don't doubt that for a millisecond – what's a bit of torn cartilage to the God who made the universe out of nothing and who raised Jesus from the dead. So it's fine to pray for healing and I have but it'd be wrong to expect and demand sudden supernatural healing as if that was something that Scripture promised. It is promised in heaven but not before. So as I ask God to heal me it's good to sound a note of 2 Samuel 10:12 in my prayers **"The LORD will do what is good in his sight."** From elsewhere in Scripture we know that Joab is no model believer – you don't come across many Christians calling their sons Joab. But in this spiritual pep talk, he's right on. In fact, I'd say he's much closer to the truth than the mystical breed of Christian that treats God like a genie in a bottle...a God who exists to fulfil their wishes and write a happy ending to every chapter if they rub the lamp right. The confidence and rest we have as believers isn't because we're sure God is going to turn every circumstance our way. Joab said, v12 let's be strong and fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. That's our part. We're called to fight the good fight of faith. That's what God wants us to do. But Joab is careful not to presume a victorious outcome because God hadn't specifically told them what the outcome of this battle would be. The text mentions no specific revelation about this battle. Hence his final affirmation: **"The LORD will do what is good in his sight."** We simply don't know whether medical tests will come back negative or positive. God hasn't told us. We can't be sure God will provide us with a better job than the one we lost. We hope a deal goes through, but it may not! We pray that God will help us with our A-levels but he doesn't promise to give us the grades we want. We pray a son or daughter will make good decisions, but there's no guarantee they will. So listen to Joab because out of his mouth comes the essence of what it means to rest in God's all-knowing, all-wise will... **The LORD will do what is good in his sight.** In his commentary John Calvin writes this about v12 - "We see, therefore, that Joab's uncertainty was not a lack of faith, for we can certainly doubt, although we embrace the promises of God and hold them as absolutely certain and infallible. What we doubt are the things which are not clear to us. That is, how he wants us to remain - in suspense about many things and to leave it all to his secret counsel and His providence." Now on this day it was God's pleasure to give Joab and Abishai a resounding victory over Israel's enemies. And God may give you the A-level results or the job you want - He may chose to heal my knee overnight but similarly He may not – He hasn't promised to. So let's learn from Joab to rest in God's will and to pray: **"The LORD will do what is good in his sight."**

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(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)