

11. Turning a shame to a victory

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One way or another all of us have experienced shame in our lives. Some of us have it more than once, unfortunately. Shame can happen because we did something wrong, or it can happen just because someone else chose to bring shame to us even though we had nothing to do with that.

Let me make an example. A woman is raped every 45 seconds in the United States. One in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused by age 16. One out of every two women will become a victim of some sort of sexual abuses in her life-time. When a person gets raped or molested, even though the victim has nothing to do with that horrible act of violence, she or he go through a array of emotions including being ashamed of oneself and even considering suicide.

Some people can never get back to normal lives because self-applied shame from rape or molestation affects them so much. But I do strongly believe that they can turn that shame to a victory in Christ Jesus.

Once again, David wanted to show kindness, but this time his effort led to war instead of peace. His kindness to his neighbor kingdom was misunderstood, and David had to defend his own honor as well as the honor of the Lord and His people. Between two famous chapters of 2 Samuel, chapter 10 gives us several practical wisdom and applications to all of us.

A. SLAPPING THE HELPING HANDS

2 Samuel 10:1-5 It happened after this that the king of the people of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. 2 Then David said, 'I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me.' So David sent by the hand of his servants to comfort him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the people of Ammon. 3 And the princes of the people of Ammon said to Hanun their lord, 'Do you think that David really honors your father because he has sent comforters to you? Has David not rather sent his servants to you to search the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it?' 4 Therefore Hanun took David's servants, shaved off half of their beards, cut off their garments in the middle, at their buttocks, and sent them away. 5 When they told David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, 'Wait at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return.'

What is your interpretation of this?

David's kindness to Mephibosheth in the previous chapter didn't stop there. Here he extends kindness towards a pagan king because he can sympathize with the loss of his father.

We don't know the occasion of Nahash's kindness to David because it is not recorded. One possibility is that Nahash, an enemy of Saul, had given aid to David during his time as a fugitive from king Saul or during his war with Ishbosheth.

It's hard to explain why these advisers told this to Hanun, the new king of Ammon. It's possible that they genuinely suspected David, or they may have just used this as a way to make themselves wise to king Hanun. It is common for liars to always suspect others of lying.

They believed that David intended to attack them. His friendly gesture was completely misunderstood.

Only slaves shaved their beards and mustaches during that time. It was an easy way to identify a slave or a runaway slave. Man's beard was considered as the greatest ornament and some men even tend to swear by their beards. Beard was that important to them.

So, the cutting off of one-half of it was the greatest insult that could have been to the ambassadors, and through them to David their king.

To make the matter worse, cutting off the ambassadors' garments in the middle was another obvious insult and humiliation. To insult the ambassador is to insult the king. It was just as if they had done this to David himself.

The same principle is true with King Jesus and His ambassadors.

John 15:18 If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

When people treat the followers of Jesus badly or persecute them, God takes this personally, as if persecution is done against Him.

Acts 9:4-5 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Listen, if there is anyone who can understand living with shame, it would be our Lord Jesus. The Son of God with all the power in the universe was subjected to the menacing Jewish priests and the brutal Roman soldiers. Before they crucified Him, he was stark naked on the cross like any common criminals. Crucifixion was a form of execution that was an emblem of suffering and shame.

B. IT IS A TIME FOR A WAR

2 Samuel 10:6-8 When the people of Ammon saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David, the people of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth Rehob and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand foot soldiers; and from the king of Maacah one thousand men, and from Ish-Tob twelve thousand men. 7 Now when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army of the mighty men. 8 Then the people of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array at the entrance of the gate. And the Syrians of Zoba, Beth Rehob, Ish-Tob, and Maacah were by themselves in the field.

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

The people of Ammon knew what they have done to David's ambassadors. David didn't reject the Ammonites, they made themselves repulsive to Israel. I like the way NIV translates for this verse: "*When the Ammonites realized that they had become a stench in David's nostrils.*" In other words, they realize that they stunk to David and David is going to do something about it.

Hiring a mercenary army was a common practice in the ancient world. 1 Chronicles 19:6 says that the Ammonites paid 1,000 talents which are about 1 million dollars to the Syrians.

David's mighty men didn't necessarily start as mighty men. Many were some of the distressed, indebted, and discontent people who followed David at Adullam Cave according to 1 Samuel 22:1-2.

One of the most famous military strategists in the world is an old Chinese man, Sun Tzu. He wrote this in his book, the Art of War, "If you don't know your enemy, and you don't know yourself, you will lose every fight; if you know yourself, but you don't know your enemy, you will win a half of battles; if you know yourself and you know your enemy, you will win every battle."

Obviously, these Ammonites didn't know their own strength, nor did they know the strength of David's mighty army. This brings an important lesson for us: With our own strength and willpower, we cannot be measured against the demonic forces. But when we realize that we cannot fight against them with our own, but rely on the power of our Almighty God, we can combat against any of demonic temptations and even onslaught assaults. Why?

1 John 4:4b Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. KJV

C. VICTORY FOR ISRAEL

2 Samuel 10:9-14 When Joab saw that the battle line was against him before and behind, he chose some of Israel's best and put them in battle array against the Syrians. 10 And the rest of the people he put under the command of Abishai his brother, that he might set them in battle array against the people of Ammon. 11 Then he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the people of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. 12 (1) Be of good courage, and (2) let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And (3) may the Lord do what is good in His sight." 13 So Joab and the people who were with him drew near for the battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. 14 When the people of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fleeing, they also fled before Abishai, and entered the city. So Joab returned from the people of Ammon and went to Jerusalem.

What is your interpretation of this?

This is a great speech by Joab before the battle. He makes at least three important points:

1) Courage and strength are not matters of feeling and circumstance.

They are matters of choices, especially when God makes His strength available to us. We can be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

2) Joab called them to remember all they had to lose.

If they lost this battle, they would lose both their people and their cities. This was a battle bigger than themselves, and the army of the mighty men had to remember that. A couple of weeks ago, I told Karen, "If we Christians actually think through the consequences of our sins, we would not commit our sins that easily." As the late German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God."

3) Joab wisely prepared for the battle to the best of his ability and worked hard for the victory. At the same time, he knew that the outcome was ultimately in God's hands.

This reminds me of an old saying from the American Revolution war against British: "Trust God and keep your powder dry."

Joab's purpose was to drive a wedge to keep the Syrians and the Ammonites from joining forces. And when Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him, he chose all of the choice men of Israel, and he put them in array against the Syrians.

When a person faces threats to his life from multiple opponents, he must neutralize the most immediate and greatest threat. To the Israelite army, the Syrians were the bigger threat than Ammonites. So, Joab put the Israelies' finest against the Syrians.

It doesn't even say that Joab engaged the Syrians in battle. This mercenary army fled before the army of the mighty men because God was with them. God promised this kind of blessing upon an obedient Israel.

Deuteronomy 28:7 The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.

D. MOP UP OPERATION

2 Samuel 10:15-19 When the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered together. 16 Then Hadadezer sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the River, and they came to Helam. And Shobach the commander of Hadadezer's army went before them. 17 When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed over the Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in battle array against David and fought with him. 18 Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians, and struck Shobach the commander of their army, who died there. 19 And when all the kings who were servants to Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore.

The enemies of Israel wouldn't quit after one defeat. They were a persistent enemy and came back to fight again, much like Wile E. Coyote.

David gathered the rest of the army of Israel to prevent this army of Syrian reinforcements from crushing the army of the mighty men. The result was glorious: the Syrians fled before Israel.

David here enjoyed one of his most impressive victories, as he defeated the Syrians. His kingdom had reached its apex – the greatest strength the nation would ever enjoy. David was strong, the people were united, the nation was unchallenged. But at this time of his greatest strength, David would experience the greatest defeat not far from this. There is a probably greater danger in success than in anything else. People are singing your praises and telling you how great you are. Someone said, "Success has destroyed more people than failures." Beware of your success. It can be a killer.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) As we trust the Lord God in the midst of difficult times, He will be glorified through our trials.

We will find that our attitude is contagious. When we glorify God, it has a healthy impact on others. They will see our example and want to glorify Him as well.

2) If some horrible thing happened to you in the past that was not your choice of action, you don't need to be ashamed. If you live in that past, you will face more difficulties. Let it go.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

3) Ask God how He can use that horrible experience of yours to bring glory to Him and comfort others. You will be surprised how much you can be a great help to the other people who are going through the same difficulties.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

4) When we are obedient to the Lord, He will do the battle for us.

Does it mean that everything will be easy? No, we still have to face the battle, we still have to prepare for the war, we still have to keep the powder dry, but it is God who fights for us.