

“Sour Grapes Made Sweet”  
2 Samuel 21:1-14  
(Preached at Trinity, February 16, 2020)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we enter **Chapter 21** we come to another major division of **1-2 Samuel**. The narrative has concluded the Bathsheba and Absalom sections and David's return to the throne. We are now dropped into the middle of a severe famine that has been going on for three years. We can't assume that this is taking place chronologically after **Chapter 20**, although some like A.W. Pink believe we are looking at events that follow David's return to Jerusalem. The text merely tells us that it took place "in the days of David." We are given a general time reference in **Verse 7** – it was after David brought Mephibosheth to Jerusalem. Some have suggested it took place sometime between **Chapters 9 & 10**.
2. Year after year the harvests failed to yield enough food for the kingdom. Famines were greatly feared in the ancient world. It is hard for those in the modern Western world to comprehend a situation where there is no food to be found. People were hungry. David sought the face of God.

David was looking for relief and deliverance from the famine. He was not necessarily looking to know the reason. God always has purpose in what He does. But He doesn't always reveal it to us. But in this case God spoke to David clearly:  
**2 Samuel 21:1 NAU** - "And the LORD said, "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."
3. God revealed to David that his kingdom was greatly suffering because of the actions of Saul years before. This seems difficult to comprehend. We all know that Saul was a wicked king and God had judged him. He was removed from power and replaced with king David. We can see the justification in this. He was rightly judged for his sin.  
**1 Samuel 15:23 NAU** - "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king."  
**1 Samuel 15:28 NAU** - "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you."
4. But this text is difficult for us to understand. How is it that David and his kingdom were suffering for the sins of Saul?
5. First, we need to refresh our memory of the Gibeonites? Who were they and how is it that Saul's treatment of them is so significant? We have to go back to the early days when Israel first entered the Promised Land. God made a firm rule regarding how Israel was to relate to the people of Canaan.  
**Exodus 23:30-32 NAU** - "I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land. <sup>31</sup> "I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River *Euphrates*; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. <sup>32</sup> "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods."

- A. Israel was careful to obey this command. City after city was destroyed and the inhabitants were killed or driven out.
- B. But one group of people heard of Israel, their God, and their army and they trembled. They came up with a crafty scheme. They approached Israel's leaders pretending to be from a far country—in other words, not of the people of Canaan and not under the curse of God. Israel believed them and entered into covenant with them. – **Joshua 9:1-15**
- C. We don't have any Biblical record of Saul's mistreatment of the Gibeonites. We know they had settled in the land Benjamin. Did Saul seek to remove them because of a holy zeal for ridding the land of pagan people, or was he more motivated by a desire to seize their possessions? Regardless of motivation, he broke covenant with the Gibeonites.  
This covenant was a solemn oath made in the name of God. It could not be broken. The entire nation was bound by this covenant.  
**Joshua 9:18-19 NAU** - "And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders. <sup>19</sup> But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them."  
To violate the oath was to bring reproach upon the name of God. We should consider carefully the solemn nature of our oaths and vows made before God.
- D. God told David the cause of the famine, but He did not reveal to him what to do about it. For this David turned to the Gibeonites.  
Their answer has troubled the readers of this text for hundreds of years.  
It is one of the Bible's most difficult stories to read. By the time we reach the end our hearts will be gripped with emotions that cannot be easily dismissed.
6. Tonight, I want us to consider the corporate solidarity of the Old Covenant compared with the transforming grace of the New Covenant.
- I. The corporate solidarity of the Old Covenant
- A. Israel was a covenant community
1. God established a covenant with Abraham.  
**Genesis 17:7 NAU** - "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."
  2. They were bound together as the sons of Abraham and by God's covenant. Jacob represented the nation – Each of Jacob's sons became a tribal head.
  3. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant. Every male was circumcised on the eighth day after birth. If one was not circumcised he was considered cut off from the covenant community.  
**Genesis 17:10-11 NAU** - "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you."  
**Genesis 17:14 NAU** - "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

4. Israel was a covenant community and God dealt with Israel with corporate solidarity.
- B. In this corporate solidarity the sins of one covenant member could be imputed to the whole.
1. This is why there were so many capital crimes. A Sabbath breaker was put to death because his actions violated God's commands to the covenant body. The violator was cut off from the body.
  2. When Achan sinned by taking goods from Jericho the guilt was imputed to the entire nation. Achan committed the trespass but the text tells us that "Israel acted unfaithfully," that it was the entire nation that sinned.  
**Joshua 7:1 NAU** - "But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel."  
**Joshua 7:11 NAU** - "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put *them* among their own things."
  3. When Saul broke covenant with the Gibeonites it was as if the entire nation had broken covenant. They had sworn a covenant before God and placed themselves under His wrath if they broke it.
- C. What could be done?
1. In breaking covenant Israel sinned against God, but they also became indebted to the Gibeonites.  
**2 Samuel 21:3 NAU** - "Thus David said to the Gibeonites, "What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"
  2. There was bloodguilt and the Gibeonites were demanding atonement. They demanded that the guilty be punished. Saul was long dead. They could not punish Saul. But his relatives were alive and shared in the covenant unity of Israel. They all bore responsibility for the sins of their fathers.
  3. The demand was harsh. From our perspective, unthinkable. Our hearts are rent to consider it.  
**2 Samuel 21:5-6 NAU** - "So they said to the king, "The man who consumed us and who planned to exterminate us from remaining within any border of Israel, <sup>6</sup> let seven men from his sons be given to us, and we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give *them*."
  4. Blood had to be shed to appease God and cleanse the land. Vengeance had to be satisfied to appease the Gibeonites.  
 Two men were taken from one family and five from another and they were executed.

D. There was a popular saying:

**Ezekiel 18:2 NAU** - "The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge"

1. The meaning was that the sins of the fathers were imputed to their children. The father's ate the sour grapes but the bitterness was experienced by their children.

2. But even as this was spoken a new day was on the horizon.

**Deuteronomy 24:16 NAU** - "Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin."

II. The New Covenant promises individual responsibility

**Jeremiah 31:29-30 NAU** - "In those days they will not say again, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge.' <sup>30</sup> "But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge."

**Ezekiel 18:2-4 NAU** - "What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge' ? <sup>3</sup> "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. <sup>4</sup> "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die."

A. In the NC the Gospel goes forth to all men individually

1. Every human being bears his own guilt and every human being must repent of his own sin.

Those who turn from their sin and trust in the Savior will be saved.

2. Their sins will be forgiven

**Jeremiah 31:34 NAU** - "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

3. The sons will not be condemned by the wickedness of their father. Nor will the sons be saved by the faith of their father. Many children brought up in the church think they are Christians because their parents are Christians.

B. This truth has far reaching implications as we consider social justice.

1. We must always seek justice. We must always come to the defense of victims of abuse, and those who have been treated unjustly.

2. We can express remorse for the past sins of others, but we cannot bear responsibility for their actions. We cannot share in the guilt of their sinful deeds. And we cannot repent on their behalf.

III. While our sins are not imputed to others this does not mean they have no effect

A. Others can suffer greatly because of our sins

1. This isn't because of imputed guilt but because of the far-reaching consequence of sin.

2. A father's alcoholism can affect the lives of his children for multiple generations.

3. A divorce can have far-reaching implications
  4. A pastor who falls into scandalous sin can leave a mark upon the congregation for years after he has departed.
  5. It gives a broader understanding of the Second Commandment  
**Exodus 20:5 KJV** - "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me;"
- B. Children most often follow the wickedness of their parents
1. They despise Christ. They despise His church.
  2. They disregard the Law of God easily dismissing God's pattern of righteousness. The wickedness of sin infects whole cultures.

**Conclusion:**

1. God is gracious in showing forth His mercy. Although we can suffer under the wickedness of those around us, we will never be held accountable for their sin.
2. In the New Covenant every man is responsible for his own soul. The Gospel goes forth to all and all stand accountable for how they receive it.  
**Matthew 16:24-25 KJV** - "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."  
**Romans 10:13 KJV** - "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."