

David Avenges the Gibeonites

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[0 : 0 0] let's turn to that passage for a short time this evening to chapter 21 of 2nd samuel and reading again at verse 4 the gibeonite said to david it's not a matter of silver or gold between us or saul or his house neither is it for us to put any man to death in israel he said what do you say that i shall do for you well once again we are forced because of the fact that we are working our way through second samuel we're forced to confront some very difficult issues i wouldn't choose this passage for a thanksgiving service i wouldn't choose it for a communion i wouldn't choose it for a baptism i choose it because the bible is given to us in books and these books have a beginning and they have a story and they have an end and if we choose as we are doing to work our way from the beginning of the story to the end of the story then you can't just pick and choose what you want depending on what's difficult or what's not and yet all of it is god's word every part of the bible is god's word whether or not we find it easy or difficult or palatable or otherwise it's all the bible and so therefore whilst i there is some hesitation that hesitation in me this evening as we have seen before is only because i'm not confident of my own ability to be able to understand a passage like this i suppose that is true every time i stand here should i ever be confident of my own ability no i shouldn't but all the more so when it's a passage that defies our understanding and which really stretches our minds and our perception we also have to be very careful that we don't pick and choose according to what is palatable to today's world you might think well what in the world is he choosing a passage like this doesn't he know that there are young people here or doesn't he know that there are visitors here well if it's good enough for us it's good enough for anyone who chooses to come and worship with us this is god's word and i hope that that whatever church you belong to i hope that it is a church that believes and loves and preaches and lays hold upon the whole bible not just the bits that are our favorite passages and our favorite verses and the bits that are easy to understand besides if you go down the road of what is palatable and not then tell me what is palatable about the bible when you think about it there isn't much is there because sooner or later you get to the gospel is the gospel palatable to today's world no it isn't because the gospel tells us it explains to us concepts that we don't understand for example the trinity how can you explain the trinity to a world that is hostile to god a world that is indifferent to god and a world that is skeptical about the existence of god let alone the god who is one and the god who is three it's not palatable to a hostile world at all

neither is the cross you say let's preach jesus let's preach the cross well by all means let's preach the cross i hope that we'll do so in a few moments time because even a passage like this i'm going to suggest to you in its place where it is in the old testament it gives us a glimpse of what god was going to do in jesus christ one day at calvary we'll get to that in a few moments time but even if we come straight to the cross the cross is not palatable to a hostile world at all because it tells of of god having become a man the apostle paul said that that was foolishness and he's right there isn't a more ridiculous message in the world tonight than god becoming a man you'd go out and tell the people in our big cities and towns or our small cities and towns that god has become a man and they'll look at you as if you were nuts you go out and tell them how that man jesus of nazareth who was also god how he was arrested and how he was mocked and how he was crucified and how he died the cruel painful death on the cross and so that by his death in which he was made to be guilty for our wrongdoing and our sin and they'll say to you that doesn't make sense now you're saying that god made his own beloved son guilty for something that he didn't do is that palatable no it isn't it isn't the gospel has never been acceptable to any society unless god by his power and by his spirit he he brings the gospel to us and opens up our hearts by faith and makes us to understand and to see what he has done in jesus christ people will not believe the bible itself tells us that that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they will not see the glory of god

and so my task tonight is not to make anything not to bring it up today or to modernize it or to make it palatable it is to simply try and to get our heads round a passage like this which is on the surface a very difficult one to understand but i hope that will be made clearer may not be crystal clear and it may still leave us with some questions but that's okay there are many parts of the bible that still leave us with questions we will never come to the point where we are able to understand the bible to the extent that all of our questions are answered that will not happen the bible is always beyond our understanding so having said all that let's try and work our way through this passage once again we're confronted by by an incident in the life of david we don't know when this incident happened by the way we're now coming to the closing chapters of second samuel and these closing chapters they kind of bring together aspects of the reign of samuel that the writer wants us to know about but he doesn't necessarily put them in chronological order so because chapter 21 that we've just read it appears towards the end of the book it doesn't necessarily mean that it took place for example after the rebellion of absalom doesn't necessarily mean that it could have taken place

it could have taken place long beforehand in fact i tend to think that it probably did so it opens with sometime during david's reign this is an incident that took place sometime during david's reign on the surface it appears that there was a famine in the land which tended to indicate that because israel were god's special people his chosen people that because they were suffering the famine that this was this showed and displayed the displeasure of god when david went to the lord and asked him and inquired of him why god had sent the famine on the land god answered him that there was a problem and the problem was that there had been an injustice that was carried out among a people in the land called the gibeonites saul had turned against them and had killed many of them and now justice had to be done so david went to the gibeonites and he explained to them that he wanted to bring about justice for them a closure and he asked them what would satisfy their desire for justice so they said to him then it's not a matter of silver or gold this is not an issue that can be but you can't buy us you can't buy our satisfaction we need to have what we're suggesting is that you take seven of saul's sons seven of the princes that were that were still there that and and they must die because of this injustice that we have suffered as a people and so that's exactly what god did that's what david did he went to the house of saul and his predecessor and he took seven of their sons and he gave them to the gibeonites who duly put them to death they hanged them and we have this heart-rending story at the end of the passage about one of the mothers of two of the sons who stood and kept vigil by the place where they had hung in order to protect their bodies until david was told about it and he brought final closure to it by burying them along with the bones of saul and jonathan from the men of jabish gilead and that was the the the incident was brought to an end so that's the story on the surface a reaction if we are to react to simply the facts as given is it fair is it fair for seven of the sons of saul to be accountable for something that their father did their late father did who is now dead is it fair for them to be taken and for them to be separated from everyone else and for them to have to be put to death for something that someone else did i mean does not the bible itself say that the sons shall not be put to death for the sins of the fathers that's absolutely correct god says that he says that your sons shall not be put to death for the sins of the fathers is this not a violation then of that principle of that law of god what i'm going to i hope i'll be able to show that there's more to it than that there's more to it than that let's look at then the whole the what the background is behind all of this the

Gibeonites were a people group they were a minority group who lived within the confines of the kingdom of Israel they were not Israelites they were native Canaanites the Gibeonites and we read about their story in that chapter that i read previously in Joshua chapter 9 this happened 400 years ago when Joshua led the people across the Jordan into Israel and when he according to god's command when he drove out the people of Canaan the Gibeonites saw what was happening around them and they decided that they had to try and save themselves from annihilation because that's what was happening to everyone else under the power of Joshua so what they did was they dressed up in old clothes and they put worn sandals on their feet they got bread crumb old bread and old satchels and old drinking vessels and they pretended that they were a people who had come from afar who wanted to come and honor the people of Israel and they wanted to come under the protection of the god of Israel and Joshua took them at their word and not now here's the bit here is the key Joshua promised them safety and security as a people group within the confines of the kingdom of Israel and he did this by way of making a covenant with them you remember what we've always said about a covenant you remember how

how important a covenant was how crucial a covenant was in the days of the people of Israel we've seen it time after time after time in various different contexts and not least in the story of David covenant is one of these words that describes the life of David you ever seen these these pictures I was in my daughter's flat the other day in Edinburgh and one of her friends gave her this rather nice this nice a well I'm going to call a picture for want of a better word but it hangs on her wall it's a rather it's a rather attractive picture that hangs on her wall but it's not a picture not a portrait it's not a scene or a person or anything it's it's a series of words there's about 20 words and they're all arranged very artistically in various places on this framed thing and they describe her life and [14 : 41] I've seen them quite a few times just words that describe your life maybe you've got one in your house just a whole series of words and they're all kind of arranged very nicely and you look at them and you're reminded of places that you've been to and people who have figured in your life I'm glad I was very reassured that my name was on the picture people who have meant something to you places that have meant something to you events that have been key events in your life now if someone was going to do this for the life of David you know what one of the words would be for sure it would be covenant we've seen it time and time and time again one of the key words and concepts that you have in the life of David covenant it was absolutely crucial it was crucial not only to the people of Israel not only to David but most importantly covenant was crucial to

God and that's why God took this situation so incredibly seriously so seriously that he had to see that something was done about it this there was no getting away from it there are some situations in life that you can brush over but this is not one of them there was a problem there was a foundational problem there was a problem that went to the root of what the Israelites were and that was simply that they had broken a covenant that had been made albeit 400 years ago but it was still a covenant and a covenant lasted indefinitely into the future so all these 400 years ago when Joshua made the covenant with the Gibeonites to assure them of their safety and their security when Saul came to the throne he started turning away from the Lord as we know we've seen that disregarded God's commands but it seems that at some point in his reign he turned against the Gibeonites who were under the protection of God by way of a covenant they of all people in Israel they were guaranteed their safety by way of a promise that Joshua had made before God to give them their safety and now Saul he turned against them and he killed who knows how many hundreds of them we don't know what this was an enormous outrageous atrocity it's what we would call today an ethnic cleansing this was not just some kind of misdemeanor that Saul had done this was a major event a major wrong an act of gross injustice in which Saul had and he hadn't just done it himself and here's the point again here's the second here's the second key issue here the first key issue is covenant the covenant that was broken the second key issue is that Saul did not just do this himself he did it on behalf of Israel he was the king the king of Israel and as king of Israel he represented the entire people of Israel so that when Saul gathered his army to kill the Gibeonites with no cause whatsoever they were innocent people the whole of Israel did it not just Saul the whole of Israel did it Saul represented them in what he did and it was no use of them to say oh well that's Saul he's the leader he's the king then the whole blame no no he represented the entirety of the people of Israel and so what we have is a situation and here's the point you might think that you might question the fairness of seven men being put to death for something that was wrong in the past but let's put it another way let's let's see this in a different light that what happened in the past was an outrageous atrocity in which probably hundreds if not more of people died unjustly and the blame lay with

Israel as a people it was an act of war it was an act of unjust war it was a war crime are we getting this are we getting it are we are we at least seeing this in a slightly different light to what we read it at first reading are we seeing by by trying to understand it in its real terms that this has this is not something you can brush over it's not just some kind of some minor wrong but this is the taking of life and you remember what God says and I don't want to get into the the whole the ethics of of retribution because for one thing there's no time but let me remind you what God has said about the taking of life in Genesis chapter 9 and verse 6 whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed for God made man in his own image and so there was a very special focus in the Bible and particularly in the

[20 : 25] Old Testament on the taking of life of human life and the reason for that was because man men and women are made in the image of God so an attack on a man or a woman is an attack on the image of God it remains that way to this day by the way that's why murder is so heinous and

so horrible and so outrageous you are attacking the image of God and so God made clear in the day again I don't want to go into issues like the death penalty and all of that these are issues which which arise out of this but for the sake of the argument the principle by which Israel existed and lived was that if a life was taken a life was given the problem was who was guilty for all of this you could say well Saul was guilty well undoubtedly but this was a collective act that involved his entire army and so you can see the dilemma that David was in he can't ignore this he can't just say sorry he can't brush it under the carpet because then there is no justice and you can't have a kingdom without justice and a kingdom that professes to serve and honor the God who is justice of the whole universe and a God who is holding David accountable for the way in which he brings justice to his remember that David's acts of justice had to reflect the God who is the judge of all the earth and so David can't do nothing can't ignore it on the other hand he cannot put everyone to death because then he and he loses the entirety of his army it's not an easy thing is it you can see the dilemma that David faced and you can sort of see how and why he asked the

Gibeonites what is it that would satisfy you and here's what they said that they were want they wanted seven of Saul's sons to be put to death on account of the atrocity that had taken place this was to be an act of atonement which was which required the blood or the lives I should say of seven men instead of and here's the point instead of the entirety of Israel that's what's happening the entirety of Israel were guilty for this atrocity that had taken place so by rights they should all pay and the wages of sin was death according to God and so this is what the Gibeonites chose by way of an atonement that was provided by seven of these men now they may very well by the way these seven men these seven sons of Saul they may very well have been involved in the deaths of the Gibeonites they may very well we don't know this for a fact but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that these men were directly responsible as men who belong to I don't believe for a moment that while Saul and his army were were were killing the Gibeonites that his sons were off wild boar hunting in the forest there is every likelihood that they were not just indirectly implicated but that they were directly responsible for the deaths of the

Gibeonites but again the we we don't know for sure what we do know is that that is what the Gibeonites demanded by way of an atonement that would satisfy them Mephibosheth you'll notice you remember that was Jonathan's son he was spared why was he spared why did he not have to die well the reason is very simple because of the covenant again David had made a covenant with Mephibosheth or with Jonathan his late father that the two families would protect one another and that David was going to give the sons of Jonathan or the son of Jonathan safe haven and and a place of security forevermore in the palace so David could not atone for the breaking of one covenant by breaking another two wrongs don't make a right so Mephibosheth was saved saved do you see where this is going in terms of the gospel itself whatever questions still remain in our minds this evening what we have in front of us like we saw last week in the previous chapter is just a glimpse a little glimpse of something that was going to happen in the fullness of time when the son of God was going to be the one suffering instead of the many when God wanted satisfaction when his justice needed to be satisfied you remember that whenever we talk about the justice of God we're talking about

God's perfect justice and whenever we talk about our relationship to God the Bible tells us that we have become estranged from God because of our sin and if anything can possibly be done about our sin it has to be a just settlement and justice requires that there be punishment for our sin that's the whole point of the cross the cross was the place where God's son was punished instead of us the one instead of the many the one being made guilty for sin and wrongdoing that he was never guilty of yet on the cross God brought our guilt upon him and he suffered God's wrath instead of us having to suffer that wrath one day it's not a perfect glimpse it's only a glimpse as the story unfolds through the old testament you get picture after picture of God hinting to his people in various places and people and events of what he was one day going to do in the Lord Jesus

Christ and that is what he did his own beloved son his own perfect son the son who he sent into the world to take the penalty for our sin and to take the punishment for our sin and to go all the way to death for our sin now some people like I said before they say they they're horrified by that prospect they say well that in itself is injustice it's not just to make an innocent person suffer because of the guilty but this is what Jesus himself is doing we must remember that when it came to Jesus he voluntarily went to the cross God never forced his son to die for our sin

[28 : 59] Jesus out of his extraordinary love for us as his people he took it upon himself to go all the way and to give his life with all the pain and the darkness and the shame and the suffering that that involved because by so doing he completed God's work of atonement in putting away our sin once and for all and setting us free God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him so tonight we have just a picture just a little glimpse in the Gibeonites and in their demand for justice and in what they accepted as an atonement which brought peace and which brought blessing once again to the land of Israel if we are looking to be right with God tonight and if you really want peace with God it can only be found through that one man who took our sin on himself and laid down his life instead of us

I can't help thinking about the mother in this story you can't you can't read it without without being struck by not only her devotion but her broken heartedness who knows what kind of thoughts went through her mind day after day day as she protected the body the bodies of her sons hanging on these poles or trees or whatever they were and I'll tell you another story that I go to when I read this story of this poor woman and all that she suffered another story I go to is in John chapter 20 in John chapter 19 when while Jesus was hanging on the cross suffering for us under the curse of God just like these these men were killed under the curse of God when Jesus was hanging and being crucified by way of God's curse how his mother stood and watched him die with that same heartbrokenness that any mother would have for her son that sense of utter horror at her own children being taken from her we cannot help but wonder and be moved not only the devotion but the questions that must have arisen in her mind the question that must have arisen in Mary's mind as she must have asked why is this happening to my son why is someone who I've watched growing up growing up and in whom there is no evil and no fault and no sin whatsoever why is he suffering the way he is and it was only in the fullness of time that the reason for Jesus' death would be made known to her just like it was made known to the other disciples the reason being that Jesus suffered as our sacrifice and as our representative and so tonight that is where our forgiveness lies there cannot be forgiveness without the death of Jesus instead of us you cannot talk about a God who forgives as if we all have a right to be forgiven we do not have a right to be forgiven we've broken God's law we've wandered away from him we've brought shame on ourselves and you know in your own heart how much shame there is and how undeserving you are just as undeserving

I am tonight so please don't let us talk as so many people do as a God who just naturally forgives as if it just comes by second nature to him without anything else God's forgiveness forgiveness is only possible through the death of his son Jesus Christ it's only possible through the death of our lamb our sacrifice the one who died instead of us do you have that forgiveness tonight that forgiveness that no one else can give you except Jesus Christ and you can have it by believing and trusting in him and following him and discovering what he can do and what he will do for those who come to him in faith and who surrender their lives to him I cannot think of a more wonderful life changing life transforming message and truth tonight than that

Jesus died instead of us let's bow our heads in prayer our father in heaven we thank you for the message of the gospel which we pray will go out to all the world this evening but we pray that it will go into us and that it will remain within us and that it will bear fruit in our hearts and in our lives Lord we pray that you will change us through the indescribable message of the gospel through the indescribable gift of the Lord Jesus Christ that you have given to us forgive our sin then and bring us your forgiveness for we ask in Jesus name amen psalm 145 and you'll find it on page 445 in sing psalms psalm 145 and that's the traditional version of the psalm the second version of the psalm and it's verse 17 to the end and we're going to sing to the tune walton verse 17 the lord is just in his ways all and holy in his works each one he's near to all that on him call who call in truth on him alone psalm 145 second version and that's on page 445 we're going to stand to sing the lord is just in his ways all and holy in his works each one he's near to all that on him call who call in truth on him alone

[36 : 42] God will the just desire fulfill of such as to him fear and dread their cry regard and hear he will and save them in the time of need the lord the heart precepts of poor and death appear to him a loving heart a dark withdrawal of wickedness destroy will will hate and clean suffer them for my mouth and lips

I'll pray to speak the praises of the lord lord to magnify his holy name forever let all flesh accord and now may the grace of our lord and savior jesus christ the love of god the father and the communion

fellowship of the holy spirit rest on and abide with each one of you both now and always amen to