

YOUR KINDNESS CAN BE INSULTED!

Today's Text: 1 Chron. Chap. 19 (cf: 2 Sam. Chap. 10]

Extract:

“Now, it came to pass after this, that Nahash *the king of the children of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his stead. And David said, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father shewed kindness to me. And David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father. ...But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Are not his servants come unto thee for to search and to overthrow and to spy out the land? Wherefore Hanun took David's servants and shaved them, and cut off their garments in the midst hard by their buttocks and sent them away” [1 Chron. 19: 1-4]*

In Africa, the death of an aged parent is celebrated, not mourned. Family, friends and the community are invited to the burial ceremony, which is marked by great feasting with food, drinks and dancing. It could be quite expensive, unless the limited resources are properly managed. When my father died in October 1993, his burial was primarily my responsibility as the firstborn son. Since I was away abroad on official duty during the preparation, my competent and kind-hearted wife, Regina, put her MBA training to work to ensure that everything went well. I returned in the heat of the burial ceremony, with little knowledge of the logistics. Sooner than later, the pressure took its toll on me. At one stage, Regina was whispering some important information into my ears and, instinctively, I snapped at her. Before I realized what I had done, I had humiliated my wife in the public! I had insulted her kindness.

That story came to my mind as I was meditating on today's topic. It suddenly struck me that it is not as far-fetched as I had thought, that it could happen to anybody. She did accept my apologies but I have not forgotten the incident. How often have your teenage children talked back angrily at you for daring to advise them to stop leaving their wet towels on their beds, not to talk of more important issues about their future? Does your husband smile back at you when you advise him to do something about his bad breath? Did you enjoy that dinner the day you advised your wife to work on her weight? How does the congregation feel about the new minister who speaks bluntly and truthfully about holy living?

Your kindness can be insulted. You can also insult other people's kindness towards you. In today's lesson, we shall study the subject and find out how to deal with the problem. David's experience with the king of Ammon will be our case study.

1. Insult and ingratitude are siblings!

It is *ingratitude* when we do not express or show appreciation to those who have done us a favour. However, that we have not *expressed it to our benefactors soon after the kind gesture* may not automatically mean that we are ungrateful to them! It is possible that we have not yet appreciated the kindness shown us. In due course, we might come to realize it. For example, my sister-in-law wrote me a nice letter of appreciation *ten years* after she had left our home! When she lived with us, she was always angry with us for the same things over which she was now showing appreciation!

Insult means to treat with disrespect or slight *the person* who has shown us kindness. Usually, the insolence is delivered *soon after* the show of kindness to us. It has the *immediate effect* of discouraging those trying to help us. If it is not dealt with immediately, by way of the offender asking for forgiveness or the offended bearing the insult, the *ripple effect* could be detrimental to the relationship.

How are ingratitude and insult related? *Insult is the worst form of ingratitude* because we are telling the benefactor *right away* that we have not appreciated his/her kindness. Apart from jeopardizing our relationship with him/her, we are setting them up to take it out on other people who may need their help in the future. The popular saying is “once bitten, twice shy!” Let us study the story of David and Hanun to make the discussion clearer.

2. A condolence visit turns sour!

While he was alive, Nahash the king of the children of Ammon was very kind to David. As you well know, the Ammonites were the descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew [**Gen.19: 38**]. When Nahash died, his son, Hanun, became king [**1 Chron. 19: 1**]. To show appreciation for Nahash’s kindness, David sent servants to carry his sincere condolences to the new king.

On the surface, that was a sweet thing to do. When we hear of the death of a family member, friend or colleague, we also show similar sentiments. We may telephone or send cards and flowers. Some of us may visit to keep the bereaved company. When Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, heard of his bereavement [especially of all his children] and his personal affliction, they came to spend seven days and nights with him [**Job 2: 11-13**].

However, if the dead were an enemy, we would be very careful how to react. If we were to go there to visit, some family members might read a different meaning into it. They might think that we had come to mock them or to celebrate our victory. In such cases, we might be better off just making a phone call or sending a card.

In David's case, Nahash was supposedly a friend, and he had no problem sending sincere greetings by the hand of his servants. However, the new king's advisers saw the visit otherwise.

The princes of the children of Ammon advised Hanun, "Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Are not his servants come unto thee for to search and to overthrow and to spy out the land?" [1 Chron. 19: 3]. In other words, they advised the Ammonite king to treat David's delegation as enemies and spies! He listened to them. He took David's servants, shaved them and cut their garments, such as to expose their buttocks, and sent them back to David half-naked and humiliated [v. 4].

In the culture of the children of Israel, your hair, especially the beard, remained untrimmed when you were mourning. For example, when Absalom forced David into exile, it was a period of mourning for those who loved their king. One of them was Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, whom David had brought into the palace to share table with him. We are told, "And Mephibosheth ... had neither dressed his feet, *nor trimmed his beard*, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace" [2 Sam. 19: 24]. That was why, when David heard what Hanun had done to his messengers, he sent word to them saying, "Tarry at Jericho *until your beards be grown*, and then return" [1 Chron. 19: 5]. What Hanun did was a major insult to David, which his kindness did not merit.

3. Adding salt to injury!

Soon after he had insulted David's kindness, Hanun and his people "saw that they had made themselves odious to David" [v. 6]. In other words, they realized that they stank before David. But did they apologise to him? Never! Instead, they compounded the problem.

Hanun hired 32,000 chariots from Mesopotamia and thousands of horsemen from Syria and Zoba. In addition to his own troops, he launched a ferocious attack on the cities and towns of Israel [vv. 6-7]. That is exactly what some of us do to compound our problems. Instead of apologizing and seeking for forgiveness, we dig into our trenches. Instead, we launch a stinging attack of disinformation against our benefactors and attempt to win allies to our cause. For example, siblings try to rein in their younger ones (with fear appeal) to side with them against their "interfering" parents or older siblings. Opposition politicians pay media boys to publish ugly but untrue stories about the government whose only offence is extending social benefits to citizens in the opposition's strongholds!

So, for no cause of his own, David found himself and his nation at war with the Ammonites for showing love and expressing sincere condolences to their king. David had to defend himself. He planned a war strategy with his generals, Joab and his brother, Abishai. Then, Joab put the troops and the nation in the hand of

God with the following encouraging words, “Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves *valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the Lord do that which is good in His sight*” [vv. 6-13].

Now, pay attention to the defence strategy. They were going to fight with all their strength (“valiantly”) to defend their land and the *truth of God* (“that which is right in His sight”). They were not defending David or avenging the insult. They were going to stand on the fear of the Lord. Your integrity will be assailed. You will be called names, such as “hypocrite,” “empire builder,” “dictator,” “oppressor,” etc. However, as long as you focus on the truth and the glory of God, you will be on the winning side.

The word of God says, “whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house” [Prov. 17: 13]. For rewarding David and Israel with war, Hanun and Ammon invited trouble to themselves. In the ensuing war, David and his men killed 40,000 footmen and 7,000 men in chariots. The Syrian war captain was also killed. In the peace treaty that was signed after the war, all the countries that warred against Israel, notably Ammon and Syria, became David’s servants [1 Chron. 19: 16-19]! Both sides got more than they had bargained for!

4. Lessons

There are many reasons why we may insult other people’s kindness to us. Among so many, the following should be noted:

a) *Timing of the kind gesture*

The mind set of the kind-giver and that of the recipient may be at different levels at the point of contact. A child who perceives the mother will never say anything nice about him will not listen the day she says something kind and helpful. A brutalized detainee in an enemy war camp will not listen to any genuine advice from the prison officers on how to successfully escape. Therefore, it is important for you to try to understand the other party’s way of looking at the issue *at the time of contact*. As a kind-giver, you will ask yourself, “Why is s(he) insulting me for being kind? Have I offended him/her by my kind action *at this time*?” As a beneficiary, you will ask yourself, “Why is s(he) being kind to me *at this time*? Is my response the right one?”

b) *Misunderstanding of purpose*

Even where the timing is right for both sides, a misunderstanding can still arise over the purpose of the kind gesture. For example, David wanted to honour the memory of Hanun’s late father, Nahash, who had been kind to him. However, the young king believed that David had territorial ambitions and had sent spies to prepare the ground for that. If the

opportunity had been created to compare notes, it is possible that the misunderstanding could have been cleared up.

c) *Mischief*

There are some people who are simply mischievous. When you do not show them kindness, especially if you are more successful than they are, they will be the first to complain that you are selfish and callous. If you show kindness, they will be the first to read ulterior motives into it. You are trying to show off your advantages over them! There is no way that you can win with them.

There is the story of a kind pastor and his wife who wanted to help an unemployed member of their congregation to get a new job. They came to know about his predicament from the member's distressed wife who had confided in her pastor's wife. As soon as the pastor was able to make a very fruitful contact with an employment agency, he sent a note to the unemployed man through his wife to go for the job interview *unfailingly* the following morning. A few hours later, the man drove to the pastor's house, brought out the note and threw it at the pastor, saying, "mind your own business!"

Young people appear to be more vulnerable to this kind of mischief. They think that they are grown up enough to be independent of their parents' control. When they get their first good job, they have made it! They do not need your help or your control anymore. When they then taste life on their own, they soon discover that independence is not a bed of feathers but of roses! They are too proud to own up about their hardship. If you hear about it from other sources and you want to help, they will insult you for invading their privacy!

In such a situation, you need to pray to the God of the Prodigal Son. It was by His grace that the young man came to his senses and returned home to apologise to his father [Lk 15: 11-20].

d) *People with a thankless spirit!*

Some people have no "thank you" in their vocabulary. They may not insult your kindness in words but, as we had said earlier, when you do not receive gratitude, over time, it becomes a slight and, therefore, an insult.

In such cases, you should expect God's reward [Prov. 19: 17; Gal. 6: 9-10]. In the words of Jesus, "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them, which *spitefully use you* and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" [Matt. 5: 44-45].

5. Conclusion

As always, God has shown us how to react when our kindness is insulted. His greatest kindness to us was to offer His only begotten Son as our Saviour. When Jesus came, He did good wherever He went. He healed the sick, fed the hungry and raised the dead to life. What was the reaction of the people, the very beneficiaries of His kind deeds? The church leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, said that He was using the power of Beelzebub [**Matt. 12: 24**]. His family members in Nazareth said that He was a mere mortal, the son of a carpenter and nothing else [**Matt. 13: 54-56**]. In other words, He was rewarded with insults.

When you claim to have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour but continue in sin, you are insulting Him and His sacrificial death on the cross. When you refuse to accept Him but join non-believers to say blasphemous things about Him, you are insulting His Father for His kind gift to humankind.

If you don't want your children or parents or friends or colleagues to insult your kindness, stop insulting God's kindness to you. Charity begins at home. Let it begin at yours!