

*The Danziger Bridge Conspiracy:
A Confusion of Loyalties
2 Samuel 11:1-4; 14-21, 27*

Intro: Pastor Ed Scott and I cruised Central City Thursday looking for church building alternatives. We stopped in the Hoffman Triangle to look at a cluster of new homes. Friday morning I learned that 46-year-old Otis Gray was shot to death in the street five hours after we walked there, the second shooting in as many days in the Hoffman Triangle.

I believe that violence and corruption are connected in our city, that people who lose confidence in the civil authority are more likely to rebel against it.

The Danziger Bridge conspiracy is part of the chaos after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city, crippling transportation and communication. Police Lieutenant Lohman arrived at the bridge on September 4, 2005, after six people had been shot by officers in his unit. They were called out on the report of gunfire at this bridge near our seminary that crosses the Industrial Canal on Chef Menteur Highway. When the smoke cleared and the shouting and shooting ceased, two people were dead, one of them a mentally challenged adult.

Mr. Lohman realized that it was a "bad shoot," he said, when he arrived at the bridge. But he has now confessed to participating in a conspiracy to cover-up the facts. He fabricated a 17-page report about the shooting. He participated in a plan to plant a gun under bridge because no weapons were found in the possession of civilians. He rehearsed with his people the story they all would tell.

Let me read what one of our people wrote about Michael Lohman: *I hope you will remember how kind Mike Lohman was to FBC family when he was a security guard at the former location. He was friendly and courteous and always there when needed. Many times he and his partner shared our Wednesday evening meal with us.*

One of the reasons I have decided to talk about this today is my fondness for Michael Lohman and my surprise and sorrow at these new revelations. I do not pretend to have any insider knowledge about what happened on the Danziger Bridge that day, and I will not speculate about it. But we do know that Mr. Lohman has pled guilty to a conspiring to cover up the truth about those events. That, along with seven other active civil rights cases in our city, and all the other incidents of corruption, is the focus of my remarks.

David and Joab, the commander of David's army, assassinated a good and loyal soldier, Uriah the Hittite. David had his reasons to kill Uriah, and Joab had his reasons for lending assistance.

Internationally, the Danziger Bridge will forever be linked with this conspiracy. But I have for years been intrigued by the structure of the Danziger Bridge and those four corner posts. When you see those great pillars as you pass by the bridge, I want you to remember these four questions and their answers:

First Question: WHO IS AT RISK? 2 Samuel 11:2: *One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing.*

***The Office of the Inspector General assesses our situation thus:

*Since Katrina, a New Orleans City Councilman and the School Board President pleaded guilty to receiving bribes, and the City's U.S. Congressman has been sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment for corruption. The New Orleans Housing Authority's Section 8 voucher chief pleaded guilty to theft for using a section 8 voucher for himself, despite receiving a six-figure salary. The City's former Chief of Technology is currently under indictment for steering contracts to cronies, and one of the city's tax assessors has pleaded guilty to raiding her charities of money given for the poor.

* In 2009 alone, a nearby Parish President and City Mayor have pleaded guilty to receiving gratuities from those doing business with their governments, a state court judge pleaded guilty to taking bribes, another judge was convicted of taking unauthorized reimbursements, still another was removed from the bench and a District judge will likely be impeached for accepting gifts from lawyers arguing cases before him.

A. There is no "criminal class." Ordinary people make mistakes, exercise poor judgment, and practice deceit.

***I walked into the cell block alone, and the door clanged closed behind me. Who are these people? I wondered, watching a couple of them pumping iron in a small recreation area and others watching television. I stuck my head into the area where double bunk beds ran in rows, and a young man on the top bunk cried out in surprise, "Brother

Crosby!" It turned out to be Steve Thorpe. I saw him last when he was a 12-year-old in my church in Gladewater, Texas. He was in prison for armed robbery.

And I said to myself, "I do know these people. They are not strangers to me. In different circumstances I would be sitting on that bunk."

B. We live in a culture that is laced with if not permeated by corruption. In this we are not unlike other populations in our country, our world, or other generations in all places. Corruption is everywhere.

C. The human heart is corrupt. The Bible says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

D. YOU are at risk. I am at risk. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

1. You are one poor decision away from falling into a pit.

2. You are one little lie away from setting in motion the web of deceit that will bring you and your family to the point of destruction.

***Good people sometimes do bad things. Sometimes they do bad things with good motives. But their loyalties are confused.

3. You are one crisis away from making a decision under pressure that will change the course of your life forever.

Second Question: WHAT AM I AT RISK OF DOING? 2 Samuel 11:2-4: *The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her...She came to him, and he slept with her.*

God asked Eve after she ate the forbidden fruit, "What have you done?" God asked Cain after the murder of Abel, "What have you done?"

The sailors asked Jonah in the middle of the storm, "What have you done?"

David was a man after God's own heart. This was the core of his being even as a boy who watched over the sheep and sang worship songs to God. But David murdered Uriah. "The thing David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 11:27).

God was displeased by what David had done. I believe this great sin was out of character for David. I know it is a sin for which he wrote long laments, for which he sought the forgiveness of God, and for which he suffered both in his family and in his heart.

"The thing David had done" displeases us all. It makes us angry. We are stunned, sickened, and repulsed.

And I wanted to ask Michael Lohman, "What have you done?"

A. BEING HAUGHTY AND ARROGANT-PRIDE.

1. Joab was an arrogant man. In this debacle with Uriah, David also was an arrogant man. Both of them believed they were above the law.

2. Pride will tell you that you are invincible, that you have no flaws, and that you can talk your way out of anything. Pride will tell you that you will never get caught, that your strategy is brilliant, and that other people are dull-witted and dumb.

B. BEING SWAYED BY MY PEERS. The day will come when your closest associates will beg you to do the wrong thing with them. They will insist that the wrong thing is the right thing to do—in this situation. They will tell you that they are all victims of lies and deceit and that they must protect themselves by building their own wall of deceit. And they will insist that you must join them.

The day will come when you will have to stand alone in doing what you believe is right. And that will be a lonely and difficult day for you. But if you do not do it, your house will go down in flames.

C. GETTING GREEDY. Joab and David sit at the pinnacle of power as relatively young men. They have all that they need or want. BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH. It never will be. If you are trying to fill the void in your soul with money and power, you will always hunger for more. David must have Bathsheba even though he already has too many wives to

love and care for. And when Uriah refuses to lie with his wife, he must kill him. He is the king, but it is never enough.

***A well-concealed lie could be worth several thousand dollars to you as you do your taxes this year. A half-truth could get you credit for a deal that you really did not make.

Third Question: WHEN AM I MOST VULNERABLE? When under great pressure: 2 Samuel 12:15: *Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.*

A. People put pressure on us. Think of the pressure David is putting on Joab.

1. The expectations of loved ones will put pressure on us.
2. The expectations of employers will put pressure on us.
3. We ourselves put the greatest pressure on us.

B. Circumstances put pressure on us.

1. We are often afraid of failure. When we sense that we are about to fail, we are tempted to do desperate and foolish things.
2. We sometimes get trapped in circumstances that are not our choice or our doing. This was true for Michael Lohman, the commanding officer of the unit which responded to reports of gunshots at the Danzinger Bridge.
3. We find ourselves poorly prepared to deal with the conflicts and pressures

C. WE OFTEN MAKE POOR CHOICES WHEN WE ARE UNDER PRESSURE.

1. It is impossible for us to imagine the pressure that our law enforcement officers operate under every day. And in the case of the Danzinger Bridge, in the aftermath of Katrina, that pressure was multiplied ten fold. They are armed to the teeth. They are listening to gunfire in the city. They know that civil order has virtually fallen apart. Looters are smashing windows and breaking into houses. People who evacuated are demanding the protection of their property. The city is flooded. Normal communication is impossible. The sun is beating down. It is 100 degrees. Many of the officers do not know where their families are or if they are okay.
2. One day it will be you in the pressure cooker. You will be called upon to make a decision in a chaotic, confusing, situation. Prepare yourself. It only takes one poor choice, and you may be headed on the road to destruction.

D. If you feel a great deal of pressure today, either internal or external, then know that you are in your moment of truth. That pressure can produce and grow more good qualities in you that you will ever develop in a comfortable environment. And that pressure can blur your vision, cause you to panic, and you could make the bad decision that ends in disaster.

Fourth Question: HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF? Psalm 51:4: *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.*

A. First, Establish the transcendent loyalty in your life.

1. If your supreme loyalty is to family members or friends, you are setting yourself up for disaster. You cannot be supremely loyal to fallible human beings who are always in danger of making terrible mistakes.
2. Make the Lordship of Christ your supreme loyalty.
3. Organize all other loyalties in your mind and heart under this one great loyalty. This would include loyalty to your spouse, your children, your parents, and your friends. It would include loyalty to country and loyalty to corporations.

B. Second, train yourself to make reference to that supreme loyalty in all decision-making. Ask yourself what loyalty to Christ means as you fill out your taxes or do your homework or take your tests at school. Ask yourself about the Lordship of Christ when friends invite you to compromise your principles. You will be developing the courage and wisdom necessary in small matters that will surface automatically in the chaos and confusion of great matters. You are learning the discipline of doing the right thing based upon your supreme allegiance.

C. REMAIN LOYAL TO PRINCIPLE

1. The rule of law means that you personally must first submit to the law. I speak of the law of God. This is what PERSONAL INTEGRITY is all about.

2. Joab is the son of David's sister, Zeruah. Joab is ambitious and vengeful. He is the leader of the army of Israel. Joab realizes that the order of David is not just. This is the murder of a good man without a trial. He should have kept the law of God and refused this assassination order. We all have the opportunity to compromise our principles in order to maintain our position or to get ahead. Any time we compromise our personal principles to maintain our position, we corrupt the system around us.

***Speakers emphasized with the recent NOPD recruits, "It is never acceptable to break the law to enforce it" (Quoting David Welker, FBI, in "Never Betray Trust", T-P, February 27, 2010, A-4).

3. Joab did not hold to the code that superseded anything his King could say. That day he ignored the command "Thou shalt not kill" which is just as valid for a soldier being asked to murder an innocent victim as it is for anyone else.

***Jim Letten, whom I deeply respect as a federal law enforcement officer, said to the new NOPD recruits Saturday, February 27, "Your most fundamental, your most sacred, your most inviolable duty...will not be your duty to the department, it will not be your duty to the city, it will not be your duty to any government, or one another. It will be your duty to the people you serve" (T-P, "Never Betray Trust," A-4; February 27, 2010).

I believe that Mr. Letten is right—the officer must give his allegiance to the people. But I do not believe that an abstract allegiance to the "public" has enough power to change behavior in the chaotic moment of conflicted loyalties.

4. A return to God is the only answer for our sin-sick city and culture because:
- No other system of ethics will trump the loyalty to self-interest and friend-interest that so often pollutes and corrupts.
 - No other system has the PERSONAL POWER of a relationship with the JUDGE. Obeying God is personal when you worship him, love him, and serve him.
 - No other morality gives the ABSOLUTE TRUTH in a situation of conflict. Every other system is situational ethics. But not the morality of the bible. Here we have a morality that is transcendent and inviolable, anchored in the precepts, principles, and person of God.

5. LOYALTY TO GOD MEANS SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE. We saw this last week in Ephesians 4:15.

***In my home of origin, you did not lie to Dad or Mom. That would get you severe repercussions. Even if it meant personal sacrifice and suffering, you told the truth. HONESTY is enshrined in Scripture in every way imaginable. It appears in the 9th Commandment, in Christ, about whom the gospel says the disciples beheld His glory, "full of grace and truth," and in true worshipers, whom, Jesus said, must worship the Father in "spirit and in truth."

6. Loyalty to God on the Danziger Bridge means adhering to the Ten Commandments, particularly, "You shall not give false testimony" (see Deuteronomy 5:20). If Mr. Lohman had, in the moment of decision, been loyal to God, he would not have propagated the web of deceit that has now felled him and will soon bring down his comrades in arms.

***I talked to a FBNO member who retired from the NOPD after more than 30 years of service. He was known by all to be an honest cop who would not move outside the law for anyone or anything. He told me there is one thing that will set you free as a policeman—the truth. He held up a finger to emphasize.

This is the same thing that my Uncle Glenn Crosby said must characterize a scientist. He must be honest. A dishonest scientist, no matter how brilliant, is no good at all. We are discovering this with the Global Warming results that were cooked to skew the results. Whether the earth is getting hotter or colder, I do not know. After this winter, maybe the latter. But I do know this—the scientists ruined it for us all when they massaged the evidence to back their bias.

CONCLUSION: CORRUPTION IS PUSHING OUR CITY DOWNWARD. Proverbs 11:11: *Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.* I do not know if we are more or less corrupt than Chicago and Illinois or Miami. But I do know that our news is full of politicians, judges, businessmen, and law enforcement officials who are going to jail or are in jail for violating the public trust.

The political and public culture of New Orleans desperately needs a new allegiance to God and his commands. We must all

return to the roots of our morality. A radical tribalism is at the heart of our systemic corruption. It will only be conquered by a new birth of loyalty to the laws which transcend personal but temporary relationships and shared experiences.

The way forward for our city is a return to these ancient moral landmarks. In the end, there is no honor among thieves or liars. We sacrifice honor when we lose our sense of worship and loyalty before the Eternal Judge of all.

***Carlos Rodriguez was found by police in the attic of Iglesia Bautista Hispana, the Kenner church he attended as a boy. He escaped from St. Tammany jail after being charged with murder. He took refuge at the church, just as Joab took refuge at the Tabernacle of the Lord when Judgment Day came for him. Joab flung himself upon the horns of the altar. It is where he died.

Men of deceit and violence will one day return to the roots of true morality—the house of worship. Here at the house of worship we learn to bow our heads before the Creator God who is our Savior and our Judge.

We need to return to the house of worship, but not wait until our lives are in ruins. We need to return today, while we can still live in grace and freedom.

If we have experienced the devastation of the lie, if we are caught already in the web of deceit, then we need to return to the house of worship for repentance and forgiveness.