

**2 Samuel 18**  
**April 7, 2024**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: How would you handle a situation where a close family member betrays you, like Absalom did to his father? How would your faith guide you in such a situation? [Let people engage]

**Transition:**

We've come to the end of Absalom's life. The death of Absalom enhances the overall conflict in the whole passage. Absalom betrayed his father, and the tension we see is David choosing to react to the news of Absalom's death as a father versus being victorious as a king. The entire story is about David's conflicted soul. David sees his own sins and weaknesses in Absalom. And David, a man after God's own heart, understands that his failures are magnified in Absalom. Let's read the text.

**BOOK:**

**Absalom's Death**

**18** David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. <sup>2</sup> David sent the troops out—a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out with you."

<sup>3</sup> But the men said, "You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city."

<sup>4</sup> The king answered, "I will do whatever seems best to you."

So the king stood beside the gate while all the men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands. <sup>5</sup> The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

<sup>6</sup> The army marched into the field to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> There the army of Israel was defeated by David's men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. <sup>8</sup> The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword.

<sup>9</sup> Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's head got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

<sup>10</sup> When one of the men saw this, he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree."

<sup>11</sup> Joab said to the man who had told him this, "What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels (4 oz) of silver and a warrior's belt."

<sup>12</sup> But the man replied, "Even if a thousand shekels (25 lbs) were weighed out into my hands, I would not lift my hand against the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.' <sup>13</sup> And if I had put my life in

jeopardy (or “otherwise”)—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me.”

<sup>14</sup> Joab said, “I’m not going to wait like this for you.” So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. <sup>15</sup> And ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

<sup>16</sup> Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. <sup>17</sup> They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.

<sup>18</sup> During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, “I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.” He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.

### *David Mourns*

<sup>19</sup> Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, “Let me run and take the news to the king that the LORD has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.”

<sup>20</sup> “You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him. “You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king’s son is dead.”

<sup>21</sup> Then Joab said to a Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.

<sup>22</sup> Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, “Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite.”

But Joab replied, “My son, why do you want to go? You don’t have any news that will bring you a reward.”

<sup>23</sup> He said, “Come what may, I want to run.”

So Joab said, “Run!” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain of Jordan and outran the Cushite.

<sup>24</sup> While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. <sup>25</sup> The watchman called out to the king and reported it.

The king said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.” And the man came closer and closer.

<sup>26</sup> Then the watchman saw another man running, and he called down to the gatekeeper, “Look, another man running alone!”

The king said, “He must be bringing good news, too.”

<sup>27</sup> The watchman said, “It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok.”

“He’s a good man,” the king said. “He comes with good news.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, “All is well!” He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, “Praise be to the LORD your God! He has delivered up the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king.”

<sup>29</sup> The king asked, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

Ahimaaz answered, “I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king’s servant and me, your servant, but I don’t know what it was.”

<sup>30</sup> The king said, “Stand aside and wait here.” So he stepped aside and stood there.

<sup>31</sup> Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has delivered you today from all who rose up against you.”

<sup>32</sup> The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.”

<sup>33</sup>The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

David’s sorrow shows us that it isn’t enough that parents train their children to be godly; they must first train themselves in godliness. David suffered the consequences for not holding his children accountable for their wrongful actions and rebellion:

The soil came from David’s indulgent parenting.

The soil came from David’s sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, after which God promised David: The sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife... I will raise up adversity against you from your own house (2 Samuel 12:10-11).

The soil came from David’s own sinful indulgence of his passions and smaller rebellions against God, which sins and weaknesses were magnified in his sons.

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (2 Sam 17-19)*. Victor Books.**

#### *B. Absalom dies (18:1–19:15).*

The vain prince followed Hushai's advice and led his army into the wood of Ephraim. Certainly he was unprepared to wage war, but "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18, NKJV). Absalom caught his head and long hair (14:25–26) in a branch and could not get down. (See Job 20:1–7.) Joab disobeyed David's command (18:5) and killed the rebel; then he sent the news to the king who, when he heard it, wept bitterly. David was a man "after God's own heart" and found "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 33:11). David's abnormal grief, however, almost cost him the kingdom.

**Merrill, E. H. (1985). *2 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 473-474) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

#### 4. ABSALOM'S DEFEAT AND DEATH (CHAP. 18)

18:1–5. **David**, now in security and with his supplies replenished, quickly took measures to reorganize his **troops** and prepare them for the inevitable encounter with Absalom. **A third** of his troops he assigned to **Joab**; **a third** to **Abishai**, Joab's brother; **and a third** to **Ittai**. David determined that he would lead the attack personally, **but** his comrades dissuaded him. He was **worth 10,000** of them, they said. **If half** of them died all would go on. But if he died the whole cause would be lost. Reluctantly David agreed to remain behind but commanded his officers that they not harm **Absalom** in the battle.

18:6–18. The encounter soon followed **in the forest of Ephraim**, a deserted place in the vicinity of Mahanaim (cf. 17:24, 27) but otherwise unknown. As terrible as Absalom's losses were by the swords of **David's** heroes (18:7), they were even greater from the elements of that inhospitable terrain (v. 8). **Absalom** himself, in a frantic attempt to escape on **his mule**, rode beneath **a large oak** tree and became tangled in its **branches**. **He was** suspended **in midair**. A soldier of David found him in this predicament but because David had ordered his men not to hurt **Absalom**, the soldier refused to harm him further. Bloodthirsty **Joab** was not so reluctant, however, and thrust **Absalom** in the **heart** with **three javelins**. Immediately **10** of his attendants **struck** Absalom to make sure he died. Absalom had already erected a memorial (**a pillar** called **Absalom's Monument**) to his own name **in the King's Valley** (traditionally the Kidron Valley immediately east of Jerusalem) because he had **no son** to **carry on his name**. **Joab** buried him in **a pit in the forest and piled** over it a memorial cairn.

18:19–23. When **Ahimaaz**, David's courier (cf. 15:36; 17:17), announced that he would set out to bear word to David of the army's victory **Joab** forbade him to do so, ostensibly to spare the king unnecessarily early grief over his son's death. Joab may also have been concerned for the well-being of the young messenger for the bearer of such bad news might not be well received. Instead **Joab** dispatched an unnamed **Cushite** (an Ethiopian) who was obviously known to David. He was either considered more knowledgeable as to what had happened to Absalom (see 18:29) or was more expendable. **Ahimaaz** was not to be denied, however, and finally received permission **to go**. Taking a shortcut, he **outran the Cushite**.

18:24–33. Both runners were seen from a distance, and when **David** understood that the nearer was **Ahimaaz** he assumed that the message he was conveying was **good** because Ahimaaz himself was **good**. The assumption was unfounded, however, for when **Ahimaaz** finally was able to deliver his message all he could do was speak in general terms of the victory over **Absalom**. The details were left to **the Cushite** who presently **arrived** and shared with **the king** the grisly news that **Absalom** and his confederates were dead. Overwhelmed, **the king** retired to an upper **room** where he privately poured out his heart before God in unremitting grief. The depths of his love for his rebel son are couched in his lament, **If only I had died instead of you**. Two of David’s sons, Amnon (13:28–29) and Absalom (18:15), died violent deaths as a consequence of David’s sin (12:10).

**Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 129-130). Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

***Absalom’s Death (18:1–33)***. The story of Absalom’s death focuses on David as father rather than as king. David remained behind the battle lines at the advice of his troops. He dispatched his commanders, instructing them to care for Absalom’s life. Absalom, on the other hand, entered into the battle as it raged in the forests of Ephraim and beyond. The terrain was so precarious that more died from its pits and thickets than the sword. Absalom himself was its victim. He was caught by the head (see 14:26) in a tree and was suspended in midair. Though reminded of David’s instructions to spare Absalom, Joab killed the helpless prince. The tragedy and disgrace of how Absalom died was even sadder because he had no heir. His three sons had apparently also died (see 14:27).

The story’s detailed description of the two messengers and David’s hopes dashed by their news accentuates the anguish of David the father. David’s sin had spelled disaster for his family and crippled his own soul: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom. If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son!”

**Tatum, S. L. (1972). *2 Samuel*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (pp. 189-190). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.**

### **The Defeat and Death of Absalom (2 Sam. 18:1–33)**

*The passage*—David told his men to deal gently with Absalom. He knew he must defeat his son, but his love for him was strong.

Absalom, riding on his mule, became entangled in a tree. His head was caught and his mule ran from beneath him. He was left helpless, but alive. One of the men told Joab. He explained that he had seen Absalom but had not wanted to kill him because he remembered the words of David to deal gently with Absalom. Joab killed Absalom and ten others joined in the deed. Joab sounded the trumpet of victory. They buried Absalom beneath a great heap of stones.

Ahimaaz wanted to carry the news of Absalom’s death to David. Joab forbade him to do so. He enlisted a Cushite, probably a slave to go. Ahimaaz insisted that he be permitted to go, and finally Joab consented. He outran the Cushite and came first to David. His courage must have failed him, because he was unable to give David the news. The Cushite arrived and told the story.

David was overcome with grief. He went to his chamber over the gate and wept. His lament is one of the saddest in the Bible. He said, “O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (v. 33).

*Special points*—David put his military men in an impossible dilemma. How could they win the victory for David and at the same time deal gently with Absalom? Perhaps David had hoped Absalom could be taken alive and that reconciliation could be made. Perhaps he had actually considered allowing Absalom to have the throne. Likely he himself did not know his own mind in the matter. Possibly only the father of a rebellious son could know his mixed emotions. The key to the question lies in the lament of David in verse 33.

Joab’s disregard for the command of David to deal gently with Absalom shows the power he had. His rebuke of David in the next chapter reveals his hard-hearted character. Nevertheless, David was so dependent upon him and owed so much to him he was in an awkward position. Before David died, he asked Solomon to make sure Joab was punished for the deaths of Abner and Amasa. He did not mention his disobedience to his order about Absalom, but this could not have escaped his memory.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**

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