

O Absalom, My Son!

By Dr. Dave Neale

Last week we saw how David made his return to God following his fall from rightness in the Uriah and Bathsheba affair. We said this happened about half way through David's 40-year reign and that David lives that last half of his life as a "forgiven life." We also talked about how the fact that while God "put away" his sin did not mean that David's life would be free from the consequences of his ways.

While God heard his cry of repentance and granted absolution, it wouldn't bring Uriah back. It would never undo the ruinous pain he caused Bathsheba, or bring back the son born to them.

Where we landed on that is that it was the transgression of the law that got him into this trouble, and in the forgiven life the requirement of keeping the law of God remained. Before and after, the one thing a king must never do is break the law. We aren't being all churchy or advocating for some legalistic lifestyle, we are just saying that this constitutes the moral foundation of the way we believe life with God needs to be viewed. David is the proof.

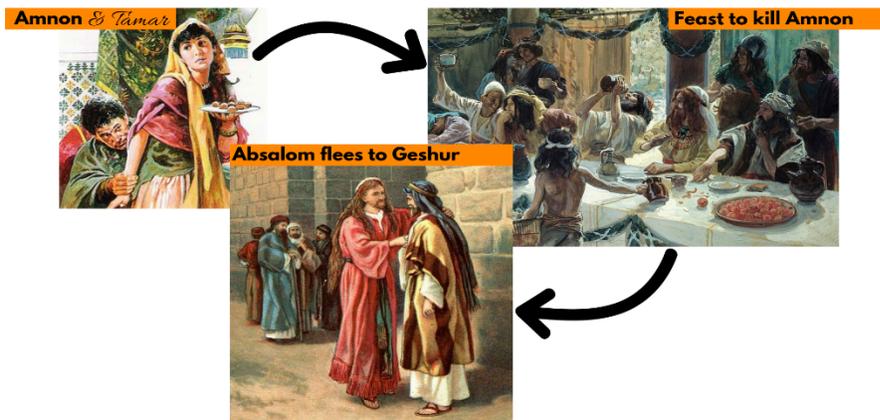
In the Text

Our story this week is about a power play by Absalom to wrest the throne from his father. In a way, power plays define of all history. It was always the case in monarchies and governments that someone is plotting to oust the one who is in power and assume power for themselves.

Thankfully modern democracies are pretty resistant to take-overs. Today one of the ways that human propensity comes out is the corporate take-over.

Now I'm going to give you the context of the story and then we will move to looking for some application to our lives.

The prophet Nathan had said to David after he killed Uriah: ***Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house...*** (2 Sam 12:11a). From 2 Samule 13 onward this is really the story of David's *forgiven life*. You would think, 'Oh, the forgiven life! This must be lovely!' But it isn't.



Long story short as we move into the life David has brought on himself: David's eldest son Amnon, the heir to the throne, commits an indiscretion against his sister Tamar. Absalom, David's third son (the

second, Chileab, is thought to have died at a young age), kills Amnon for his sin against Tamar at a feast two years later. Absalom flees and for three years and lives in Geshur, an unconquered corner of Israel from which his mother came (Maccab).¹

That is where the story comes up to as we look at our text for the day in chapter 18.

Here is something interesting about Absalom that you need to know:

Now in all Israel there was no one to be praised so much for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. When he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight (2 Sam 14:25-26).

Now I looked on the internet and that is 5 *pounds* of hair! Now I only believe 2 things that I read on the internet. The time and the weather – and the weather not so much. So I can't really vouch for this fun fact but that is the best I can do. (I actually use the web constantly in my research, Wikipedia is awesome). You can find the most obscure repair for a Datsun 240z on YouTube! It's amazing.

Back in the late 80s as a post-grad school doing my PhD in England we didn't have the internet. Your only access to knowledge was books. You had to spend months and years in the library digging stuff out. If I wanted to know where in the Talmud an idea turned up, I had to look through the Talmud. Today you'd do a search and have 300 references out of hand. That was real scholarship.

But while Absalom was away the king ***now was consoled over the death of Amnon...*** grief does recede. And he began to miss Absalom. ***...the king's mind was on Absalom*** (2 Sam 14:1). This shows how the love of father for son, the parent for child, can never be set aside. David allows Absalom to return but he stays in his own house and isn't allowed to see David. But after two years they reconcile (2 Sam 14:28-33).

So he came to the king and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom (2 Sam 14:33).

But Absalom, even though he is now the eldest son and in line for the throne, is worried that David will pass rule to another son, or is just impatient, or his beauty and privilege betrayed his own heart, or, more likely, he had bad counsellors.

We are very impatient in life, needing to wait for God by often unwilling to do so. So we act impetuously. It never seems to occur to Absalom that the best way to make his way to the throne is to live righteously before his father and the Lord.

Instead, he sets out to ***steal the hearts of the people of Israel...*** and he sits by the gate of the city dispensing justice and ***Whenever people came near to do obeisance to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of them, and kiss them*** (2 Sam 15:5-6).

Four years later he sets himself up as king in Hebron via a secret network and lots of people joined in and David had to flee Jerusalem because ***"the hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom."***

¹ David's had six sons while his capitol was in Hebron. See 2 Sam 3:3. In order of age Amnon, Chileab (deceased), Absalom, Adonijah, Shephatiah and Ithream.

Absalom betrays his father, commits all sorts of deeds to humiliate and destroy his father, and actually plots to have him killed in 2 Samuel 17.

David orders Joab his trusted general, as they go out the gates of the city to quell the rebellion ***“Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom”*** (2 Sam 18:5).

The rebellion is quashed (David was always a better military leader than anyone), and much against the king’s wishes Absalom is killed in the melee.

Here is the part you need to understand about his hair, because as Absalom fled on a mule his hair got caught in an oak branch and David’s general Joab killed him with 3 spears (2 Sam 18:9-15).

When they bring David the news of victory over the rebels they also the news of Absalom’s death.

Here we have one of the most heart-rending moments of the whole story, weeping in his chamber he cries:

“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam 18:33)

From the Text

What does the story teach us? What do we take into our week? Well, we don’t have to change the world every week in what we see. But do need to constantly refresh our perspective by rereading and remembering the stories that have been given to us.

One take-away we could be you reap what you sow. So be careful how you sow. Sow betrayal, reap betrayal.

- But looking a bit deeper, it seems to me that the David and Absalom story teaches us this: God is betrayed by David. And because of the murder of Uriah and the taking of his wife it was said that ***...by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord...*** (2 Sam 12:14). And yet, when he repented God “put away his sin.”

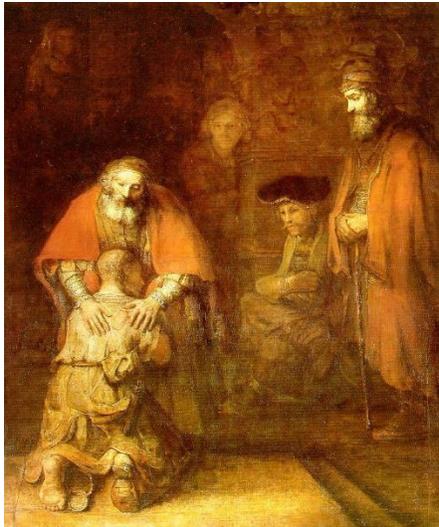
God cannot help but forgive the repentant son David who returns with his heart in his hands.

- But then, just as David continues in the forgiven life, he too is betrayed by his son, the beautiful Absalom. Likewise, David is ready to forgive all of the treachery to have his son back. The lesson here isn’t you reap what you sow, it is that in God’s grace you reap what you didn’t sow. You reap forgiveness rather than the expulsion you deserve.

God’s love for David floored us last week as we looked at David’s fall from righteousness. God’s parental-like love for David made him forgive the most awful betrayal of loyalty by David. Because that is how love works when you are family. That is how love works when you are in a gracious relationship with a Covenant God.

This is how God feels about David. This is how David feels about Absalom. And this is how the father in the Parable of the Prodigal in Luke 15 feels about his wayward son. Like David, like Absalom, the prodigal son messed up big-time. He betrayed his family; he spent the proceeds of the House of the Father, the family’s very heritage and future on foreign women and loose living abroad. A betrayal that, like David’s and then Absalom’s, is difficult to fathom.

The reprobate son, having wasted his entire inheritance on loose living is welcomed back into his father's arms.



I close with this [and will ask the musicians to come up].

Romans 8:15 ff says: ***For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.***

The lesson doesn't always have to be complicated or hard. Today it is that God is our parent and we are his children and all that this implies.

Amen