

## 2 Samuel 17:24-19:8 — Battle For The Kingdom

**November 12, 2023**

Good morning CrossWinds Church! If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are grateful to have you. I have a quick announcement before we get to our study.

Our second core value at CrossWinds is community. We value relationships. That means knowing others and being known by others is important at CrossWinds. God gave us spiritual gifts to serve other Christians in the church. We need other Christians to serve us in the church with their gifts. To help us better live out the value of community, we have name tags in the foyer. Name tags help minimize those super awkward moments in the foyer where you see people, and you should know their names, but you don't know them and are afraid to ask their names. Name tags are especially important for new folks who don't know anyone. We encourage you to wear name tags to help us better know and love our neighbors, especially the new neighbors among us.

Now that I encouraged you to wear name tags, surprise surprise! Next week, we are changing how we take care of name tags on Sunday. Instead of preprinted name tags on the wall, we are moving to four iPads and mini printers. It is a super slick system that is easy to use. You type your phone number on the iPad screen. The names of the people in your family pop up. Make sure you check the names of everyone who is with your family and press the green go button. Your name tags will shoot off the printer. It is super slick. It also takes care of attendance in our database and saves a few hours of manually clicking people present or absent each Sunday on a computer screen.

I will send everyone a video this week to show how it works. Next week, as a pastor appreciation gift, I have two requests.

First, if you are not someone who wears a name tag, begin next week to wear the name tag. It is a way for us to be more welcoming to new people and avoid awkward moments when we don't know someone's name.

Second, be patient. We will plan ahead, but as with anything new, there might be a glitch or two when we use it. Be patient with us. We will have people at the check-in stations to help. If any glitches show up, we will iron them out ASAP. We used the system successfully in the student ministry for the last two weeks. We are ready to move it church-wide.

Let's pray, and we will jump right into our study. We have a lot to cover this morning.

#### Prayer

This morning, we continue our studies in 2 Samuel. Today, we are studying 2 Samuel 17:24 to 19:8. That is a lot of text, so we must move fast. If you look at the outline in your bulletin and think your eyes are going bad because the text is too small to read, you don't need an appointment with the optometrist. I had to use a smaller font to get all the text on one sheet of paper. Next week, the text will be larger, and you will think your eyes are better. Hold off on buying new glasses.

If you are looking for action, you came on the right Sunday. These verses read like a Jason Bourne or Mission Impossible movie. There is nonstop action.

We have war, death, last-minute rescues, and unexpected defeats. Hold on to your seats. It is a wild ride.

Before we continue with the story, let me take a few minutes for those who have just joined us to get up to speed with the story. 2 Samuel is the story of the rise and fall of David. In the first half of the book, David does tremendously well. He moves from becoming a fugitive on the run from King Saul to the king of Israel and a world leader. In the middle of the book, in 2 Samuel 11, everything changes. At the height of his success, David had an affair with Bathsheba. She became pregnant, and to cover what he did, he killed her husband, a man named Uriah.

God was not happy about this. He sent a prophet named Nathan to David. Nathan called David on the carpet for his sin. David repented and was forgiven. He would not die. He was allowed to remain in power, but even with forgiven sin, sin still has consequences. One consequence was that just as David killed Uriah with the sword, the sword would not depart from his household. Constant fighting and death would be part of his family. Another consequence was that just as David took Uriah's life, he would lose the lives of four of his sons. The first was his infant son, born to Bathsheba. The second was Amnon, his oldest son. A third son, named Absalom, will die this week.

One clear lesson that hangs like an umbrella over the book's second half is the reminder that the brief pleasures of sin are nothing compared to the long-term suffering that comes from sin. The Bathsheba and Uriah event happened almost 10 years before Absalom's coup and attempted murder of his father. All of

this was a long-term consequence of David's sin. None of this suffering was worth that brief night of pleasure. That is not just true for David, but it is also true for us.

Another lesson from the recent chapters is that God was at work behind the scenes in David's life. God is also at work behind the scenes in our life. In recent chapters, God was at work behind the scenes disciplining David. God has also been at work behind the scenes, delivering David from those who sought his life.

Last week, God was at work behind the scenes in Absalom's heart, leading him to prefer foolish advice over wise words. When Absalom came to Jerusalem, he had two counselors around him giving advice. One was Ahithophel, a genius who was a former counselor of David who was working against David. A second counselor was advising Absalom. His name was Hushai. He was still loyal to David. He worked deep undercover for David as he pretended to be a loyal counselor of Absalom. He advised Absalom not to attack his father right away but to give David a pause. Attack him later. That pause allowed David, his family, and his men to escape.

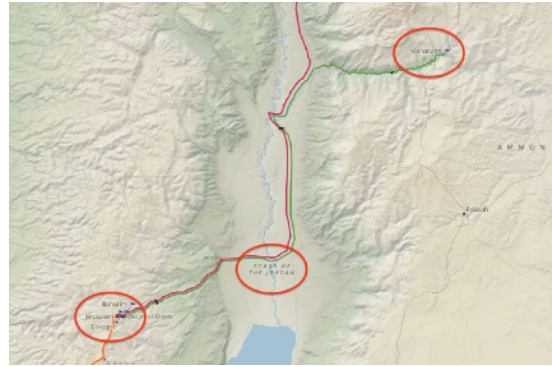
Last week, when we left off our study. David's family and men crossed the Jordan River by night and escaped. That is where we pick up the story.

### **David And His People Regrouped**

**Then David came to Mahanaim.... 2 Samuel 17:24 (ESV)**

In Hebrew, Mahanaim means two camps. It was the center of Ish-Bosheth's rule after David became king at Hebron. Ish-Bosheth was King Saul's son who set up a rival kingdom to David. The irony is now that David fled

Jerusalem, Israel was in a state of two camps once again. Under Ish-Bosheth and David, the kingdom was divided. Now, with Absalom's coup, the nation was divided again.

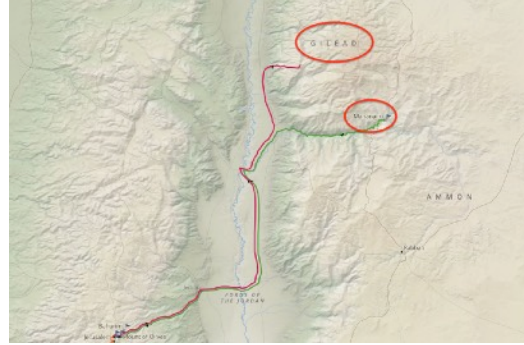


...And Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. Now Absalom had set Amasa over the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra the Ishmaelite, who had married Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. And Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead. 2 Samuel 17:24b–26 (ESV)

We read that Absalom crossed the Jordan and pursued David with all the men of Israel. Apparently, he followed some versions of Hushai's advice from last week. Hushai urged Absalom to wait before he attacked his father. Hushai suggested Absalom perform a general draft of all the men in the nation to create an overwhelming army. Absalom did that. This is why all the men of Israel crossed the Jordan River in pursuit of David and his men. We do not know the size of Absalom's army, but I am sure it far exceeded the size of David's.

Next, we meet the commander of Absalom's army. We know Joab. He was the commander of David's military and was loyal to David. Absalom needed an army commander in his place, so he appointed Amassa. What makes this interesting is the genealogy. Amassa was a nephew of David and the cousin of Joab. This means civil war was a bad version of Family Feud. The opposing generals were related to one another, just as the kings were a father versus a son.

It ends by telling us all Israel, and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead. At this point, the entire nation rejected David. The nation chose Absalom as their new king. All the men in the nation gathered to war against David. They plan to snuff him



out as the dew falls on the ground. everyone in the nation gathered to go to war against David and snuff him out. Things were not looking good for David and his family. Everyone was described as weary, exhausted, and hungry when they came to the Jordan River. Now, they traveled an ever farther distance. They are weak, starving, and desperate. The army that is prepared to destroy them is overwhelming. This looks like the end.

You know how God works. He loves hopeless situations. When we see no way out, God loves to go to work in the background to rescue his king and kingdom. Let's see what God does.

When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, brought beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds and sheep and cheese from the herd, for David and the people with him to eat, for they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness." 2 Samuel 17:27–29 (ESV)

By the time David arrived at Mahanaim, word was now traveling around the countryside about what happened to David. People heard what his son had done to him. Last week, just as God was at work in Absalom's heart, leading him to follow bad advice. God was working in the hearts of people around David,

prompting them to come to his aid. We get a brief list of some of the powerful people God brought to help David in his time of need.

Shobi, the Ammonite, was the first man. He was a brother of Hanun, who at one time despised David. He led a war against David in 2 Samuel 10:2. There must have been an interesting story of how Shobi went from hating David to supporting David and helping him in a time of need. It is likely that after David conquered the Ammonite city of Rabbah, he installed Shobi as the city's governor. It looks like it was the kindness of King David that changed his heart. He traveled 21 miles to come to David's aid with needed food and supplies.

Machir also came to his aide. He was originally a staunch supporter of King Saul. He lived in the desert region. He cared for Mephibosheth, King Saul's one living grandson, until David found him. David restored Mephibosheth to be head over King Saul's farms and gave Mephibosheth a permanent seat at the king's table. Machir was also transformed from an enemy of David to a friend of David, most likely because of David's kindness to Mephibosheth. He was a wealthy man who traveled 33 miles with supplies and men to help David in his time of need.

Barzillai is the third notable man. He was also an extremely wealthy man whose heart God prompted to help David. This is the first time we meet him in the story, but we will meet him again later in the story. He traveled 22 miles to bring David food and supplies.

The text tells us that David, his family, his children, and those with him were hungry, thirsty, and weak. God used other people to provide David's daily bread.

Let's move to the exciting part—the Battle.

## The Battle

We are not told how much time passed between the end of 2 Samuel 17 and the beginning of 2 Samuel 18. It may have been a week. That time was crucial, especially for David's family and men to regroup and refuel. God was at work behind the scenes in this time.

Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. And David sent out the army, one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite... 2 Samuel 18:1–2b (ESV)

As David prepared for battle against his son and a massive army, David organized his army under commanders of hundreds and thousands. If you were with us last week, this sounds odd. When David escaped Jerusalem, most Bible scholars believe there were no more than 2,000 people with him, many of whom were women and children. Where did all these people for the military come from?

When Absalom kicked off his rebellion in Hebron, he timed it well. When Absalom and the mob with him headed for Jerusalem, Joab and the army were out of town. This left Jerusalem defenseless, so David and his family fled the city. Most likely, Joab and the army were on the east side of the Jordan on a mission. This was probably why David fled in that direction. The pause in pursuing David that Hushai suggested didn't just allow David to escape. It didn't just allow David to regroup and refuel with food. It also allowed David to link back up with Joab



and the rest of the army. Has Joab and the army ever experienced defeat? No. Do you see God at work behind the scenes, turning the tables to save his king and the kingdom?

David divided his army into three divisions. Joab heading one. Abishai, who was Joab's brother, was heading another division. Ittai the Gittite headed the third division. Ittai was a Philistine. He supported David with the 600 men he brought with him. Here, we find he was in charge of leading an entire division of the army composed of all foreigners who came to fight in support of David. We don't know how many foreign fighters came, but it was enough to be a division of the army. While David's army was significantly outnumbered, God was turning the tables.

Amassa, who was the commander of Absalom's army, was a new commander with little experience. His army was larger but it was composed of untrained men who were drafted into service. David's army, while smaller, was under the seasoned leadership of Joab. All of them were trained and experienced soldiers.

...And the king said to the men, "I myself will also go out with you." But the men said, "You shall not go out. For if we flee, they will not care about us. If half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore it is better that you send us help from the city." The king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do."... 2 Samuel 18:2b-4a (ESV)

David planned to lead the army, but the people refused to let him go. They knew this war was like a game of chess. If you killed the king, the game was over. A dead David would not just be the end of a king. It would be the end of the kingdom. No matter how much David wanted to fight, he needed to be protected and stay behind.

Absalom was following Hushai's bad advice. In Hushai's bad advice, he encouraged Absalom not to protect himself from the battle, but to lead the battle and be a hero. The problem with this strategy was they were playing a game of chess. Just as a dead David would spell the end of the kingdom, a dead Absalom spell the end of the coup. In his pride, Absalom didn't understand his value as a target.

To give David something to do, they told David to stay at the city gate and then, if needed, send help from the city. He wisely chose to listen to the advice of his men.

...So the king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. 2 Samuel 18:4b (ESV)

In human terms, the future of the king and the kingdom was in the hands of this army. Out there, somewhere in front of them, was a much larger army eager to take them on, to overwhelm them from all sides so there would be no escape like dew falls on the ground.

And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom. 2 Samuel 18:5 (ESV)

This is where things get weird. The king spoke these words, but it was a father's voice. Absalom was a traitor and a murderer. He started the entire coup. It was his fault the nation was in civil war. It was his fault that thousands were about to die. As a father, David overlooked that. When he spoke those words, it didn't help the troops' morale when the king told them not to hurt the enemy.

Absalom was also not a young man. He was in his thirties and had multiple children. That is an adult. David could not bring himself to see his son's choice as any more than youthful foolishness.

Let's look at the battle. I am sure the war was longer than a day, especially considering the number of casualties.

So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword. 2 Samuel 18:6–8 (ESV)



David and his men chose the location of the fight. It was an area known as the Forest of Ephraim. The forest of Ephraim was located in the area of Gilead. Even though it was located in Gilead, it was called the forest of Ephraim because this is

where the tribe of Ephraim was defeated by Jephthah in Judges 1:25. It was a thickly wooded forest of rough terrain with steep cliffs deep ravines and dense forestation. This kind of terrain made it difficult for Absalom's inexperienced soldiers to move and to smother David's soldiers by sheer numbers.



It says the loss was great that day.

The word great is only used in one other place in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. It was used to describe Israel's defeat in battle back in 1 Samuel when the sons of

Eli were involved. At that time, God fought against his own people, insuring a massive defeat on account of Hophni and Phineas' sins. The same thing happening here. God was involved in the battle, defeating Absalom and his troops. There were massive casualties, 20,000 men. Some scholars believe 20,000 is only the number of deaths in Absalom's army, not the total number of casualties from the war.

It also says the forest devoured more people that day than the sword. In Hebrew, it says the forest ate up more people than the sword. This suggests the supernatural intervention of God in the battle. God used the thickly wooded forest and deep ravines to impale soldiers and ensure their deaths from the terrain.

It reminded me of the Chronicles of Narnia movies. The Prince Caspian movie in the series has an interesting scene in the final battle. The armies of Aslan were losing. When Aslan's army seemed to face certain death, the trees fought against the enemy. I wonder if C.S. Lewis was inspired to write that ending from this chapter of 2 Samuel.

If you are like me, you are left wondering what it might look like to have the forest fight against Absalom's army. What kind of things happened that ensured their deaths? Let's find out.

### **The Death Of Absalom**

Now we move from the general battle to one particular moment in the battle and the role one particular tree played in spelling the end of a dreaded man. Let's see what happened to Absalom.

**And Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his**

head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. 2 Samuel 18:9 (ESV)

Absalom just happened to meet the servants of David. It is worded as a chance encounter, but we know it wasn't a chance. God arranged this. Absalom was riding his mule. This was his royal horse. Absalom was committed to looking good. He was all about image. Just as he rode around Jerusalem in a chariot, which had no practical value for war in that area, he was riding the royal horse in a thickly wooded forest, which also had no practical value in that terrain. He saw David's men and panicked. He galloped off at top speed. As a teenager, my mother always told me to keep my eyes on the road to avoid an accident. I don't think anyone told him that. I think he looked behind him to see how close David and his men were behind him. He didn't see it coming. His horse ran under the branches of an oak tree. The branches went up the back of his head, forking through his long, thick hair. The horse rode on, leaving him suspended in the air, failing his hands and feet back and forth. This was poetic justice. What was Absalom's pride? What did he boast about and refuse to cut but once a year? His long hair. The hair he boasted about caught him and left him hanging in a tree, dangling between heaven and earth.

As we saw last week, God was working against Absalom. A few hours before, it wouldn't surprise me if he boasted about his large army, fast horse, and good looks. Now, he was left hanging in the air by his fancy hair, without a horse and an army.

And a certain man saw it and told Joab, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." Joab said to the man who told him, "What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt." But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the

weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king's son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake protect the young man Absalom.' On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." 2 Samuel 18:10–13 (ESV)

A soldier looked over, and Absalom was stuck in the tree. He went to Joab with the news. Joab was shocked the man didn't kill him. Joab says he would have rewarded him with ten pieces of silver and a belt. This guy knew Joab's character. He said even if he felt in his hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, he wouldn't kill the king's son. Everyone knew David told the army not to hurt him.

In addition, this man knew that if he killed Absalom, Joab would not have stuck up for him. He knew Joab could have poor character, and that is what we find next.

Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak. And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him. 2 Samuel 18:14–15 (ESV)

Joab stuck three Javelins in Absalom before they cut him out of the oak and let him fall on the ground. It says Joab put the javelins in his heart. I don't think three javelins were in his literal heart, or he would have died. I checked the Hebrew. I may be wrong, but I believe he threw the javelins into his mid-section. That way, he wasn't going anywhere with three javelins in his chest when they cut him out of the tree. It says after that, ten young men surrounded Absalom, stuck down, and killed him. This way, there wouldn't be a single person attached to Absalom's death.

As far as Joab was concerned, it was mission accomplished. It was a chess game. When the king was dead, in this case, when Absalom was dead, the war was over because the coup was finished.

Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained them. 2 Samuel 18:16 (ESV)

After that, the soldiers took Absalom and gave him a burial, but it was not the kind of burial for which he hoped.

And they took Absalom and threw him into a great pit in the forest and raised over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled every one to his own home. 2 Samuel 18:17 (ESV)

As we know, the terrain in the area was rough. It had pits and holes. They threw him into one of the pits, and all the soldiers grabbed rocks that they threw over his body until there was a huge pile of rocks over his remains. This was a makeshift monument. It was a monument with a purpose.

In Joshua 7:26, when Israel entered the Promised Land at the battle of Jericho, a man named Achan kept from the spoils gold bars and a robe that were to be destroyed. On account of his deceit, Israel was defeated in their next war. When his deceit was discovered, he was killed, and a huge pile of rocks was thrown over his body, it was a makeshift monument of shame that identified him as a sinner who caused God's people great grief.

And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor. Joshua 7:26 (ESV)

They did the same thing for Absalom. This great pile of rocks was a monument of shame that identified him as a sinner who caused God's people

great grief. That wasn't the kind of legacy he wanted to leave, but it was the kind of legacy he left. Earlier in his life, he built a monument to himself.

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance." He called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's monument to this day. 2 Samuel 18:18 (ESV)

In 2 Samuel 14:27, we read about Absalom having three sons and a daughter. His three sons died when they were young. He had no legacy for future generations, so he erected a monument to himself in the King's Valley, the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem. This was eerily similar to what King Saul did.

And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal." 1 Samuel 15:12 (ESV)

A little bit of advice. When someone builds a monument to themselves, they are not the kind of people you want to remember in history. They are the kind of people you want to forget. Absalom pictured himself as a great person when he built his monument to himself in the King's Valley. The actual monument the people erected for him was burying him under a huge pile of rocks to identify him as a great sinner who caused the nation much grief. 20,000 dead people for a needless war, all because Absalom wanted to overthrow his father and be in charge.

The way God worked in the background in so many reversals is interesting. Absalom set up a monument for his glory. When he died, the people built a monument to his shame. Joab was the one who believed in Absalom and brought him home from exile. Joab was the one who took his life. Absalom was filled with vanity over his hair, but his hair was what caught him in a tree and led



to his death. Can you see God at work in the background with these ironic reversals?

### The Messengers

Absalom was dead. He was buried under a pile of stones. Somebody needs to tell David the good news that the war was won, and the bad news that his son was dead.

Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Let me run and carry news to the king that the LORD has delivered him from the hand of his enemies." 2 Samuel 18:19 (ESV)

Ahimaaz was the son of a priest. He was on the Jerusalem track team. We saw him last week when he ran the 20 miles from Jerusalem to the Jordan River to warn David of Athithophel's plans to kill him that night. He wanted to run again to tell David the good news that the war was over and he would live.

And Joab said to him, "You are not to carry news today. You may carry news another day, but today you shall carry no news, because the king's son is dead." Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran. 2 Samuel 18:20–21 (ESV)

Joab didn't want Ahimaaz to run with this news. He didn't want David to remember him as the guy who brought him the bad news that his son was dead. Joab chose another runner to take the news, a Cushite. The people of Cush come from the area of Sudan. The Cushite was one of those fast African runners that we see in the Olympics, who can run all day. Joab sent him off.

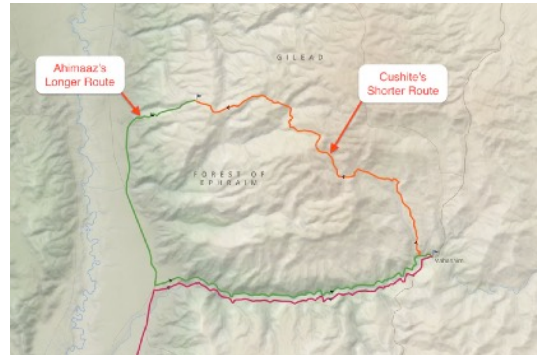
Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?" "Come what may," he said, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." 2 Samuel 18:22–23a (ESV)

Can't you picture this? Ahimaaz was one of those young, energetic guys that just wanted the chance to run, especially with this good news. He just kept

badgering Joab and pestering him. Finally, to pacify him, Joab let him run. He figured the speedy Cushite, who had left a while before, would arrive first to give David the bad news since he had a head start. Here is another reversal.

... Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and outran the Cushite. 2 Samuel 18:23b (ESV)

Ahimaaz was a tricky guy. He took a different route. The Cushite ran through the forest with all the trees, cliffs, and pits. It was like running a constant steep chase with all the obstacles. He couldn't make good time. Ahimaaz took a longer route but was on the plain, so it had no barriers. He was in top gear the entire way.



### A Grieving Father

Now, the camera shifts back to Mahanaim, where David anxiously awaits news from the battle because he doesn't have social media or a cell phone. Verizon didn't have service in his area.

Now David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he lifted up his eyes and looked, he saw a man running alone. The watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he drew nearer and nearer. The watchman saw another man running. And the watchman called to the gate and said, "See, another man running alone!" The king said, "He also brings news." The watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man and comes with good news." 2 Samuel 18:24–27 (ESV)

David had a man climb the wall and scan the horizon for news. Finally, he saw something. A man running alone. That was likely good news. It was not an army in retreat, just one man with news.

Next, the watchman noticed another man running from a different direction. That was interesting. The first man in the lead appeared to be Ahimaaz. They didn't recognize him by his face but by his stride. He had a funky way of running that gave away his identity. Finally, he arrived.

Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." And the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was." And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still. 2 Samuel 18:28–30 (ESV)

Ahimaaz arrived exhausted and spoke only one word as he caught his breath. In Hebrew, it was Shalom. All is well. He gave God the credit for the victory by showing his good upbringing as the priest's son. Surprisingly, David doesn't care about the victory. He wanted to know what happened to his son. Ahimaaz flubs this one. He claimed there was a lot of commotion and he didn't know what happened. I think he knew. He saw the massive pile of rock. He was afraid to speak the truth. The significance of this moment will be apparent later in the story. As the other runner arrives, David puts Ahimaaz aside.

And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king! For the LORD has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man." 2 Samuel 18:31–32 (ESV)

Like Ahimaaz, the Cushite spoke of the general victory, then, after David's prompting, spoke of Absalom's end in a diplomatic but unambiguous way. David's reaction to this news is one of the most moving verses in the Bible.

And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Samuel 18:33 (ESV)

When it says David was deeply moved, his entire body trembled. The text will spend a lot of time covering David's incredible grief at this moment. It wants us to slow down and reflect on it a bit.

Why was David so overwhelmed with grief in Absalom's death? Here are four possible reasons.

**David was overwhelmed with grief because parents love their children.**

Even though our children may go in a completely different direction than we hoped, planned, or prayed, they are always our children. David was grieving as any father would, even though his son was a murderer and responsible for the deaths of 20,000 people, he was still a father's little boy, so he grieved in his death.

**David was overwhelmed with grief because he knew the death of his son was connected with his sin.**

He knew his son's death was the third installment of four sons he would lose on account of his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba. Remember what he was told.

...You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now

therefore the sword shall never depart from your house,... 2 Samuel 12:9–10 (ESV)

While Absalom was fully responsible for his own actions, ultimately, this tied to his sin. His sons suffered because of his sin. I am sure that breaks any father's heart.

**David was overwhelmed with grief because he feared his son would be eternally separated from him.**

It doesn't say this directly, but it hints at it indirectly. When David's first son died, his infant son that he conceived with Bathsheba, he got up and ate. He resumed life. He said, "He shall not come to be with me, but I will go to be with him." He was confident that his baby son would be in heaven to meet him. When it came to Absalom, he had no confidence in that. If anything, he felt the last place Absalom would be was in heaven. The fruit of Absalom's life had all the hallmarks of a life separated from God. That was why he grieved.

**David was overwhelmed with grief because he wished he had done things differently.**

I am sure he wished there were many things he had done differently. I am sure he regretted the years he kept Absalom at arm's length because of his frustrations with him. In the face of death, everyone has the regrets wishing that had done things differently and spent time more strategically. I am sure those feelings were washing over David's heart.

When Larry King interviewed Billy Graham, he asked Dr. Graham if he had any regrets. Dr. Graham said he regretted his sins, but he also regretted not spending more time with his children. He traveled too much, and they were only

young once. What a great reminder for us that our children are only young once. We will only look back and regret not having spent more time with them, not less.

## Lost in Grief

David, who won the battle, was about to lose the war because he was lost in grief and regret.

It was told Joab, “Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, “The king is grieving for his son.” And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. 2 Samuel 19:1–3 (ESV)

The day of national salvation became a day of national mourning for the king and the people. Those who risked their lives for the king were made to feel like they had acted against him.

The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, “O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!” 2 Samuel 19:4 (ESV)

David was inconsolable. He was in a spiral of grief. Have you ever been there? Have you ever found yourself in a spiral of sadness that you can’t get out of the cycle of grief? Have you found yourself stuck in pity and regret? That was David. His grief was understandable in many ways, but he was still the king. Thousands of people needed him. They needed to be appreciated for risking their lives to save the king. Somebody needed to snap him out of it. Enter Joab.

Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, “You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines,... 2 Samuel 19:5 (ESV)

Joab came into David’s presence and verbally slapped him across the face. It wasn’t that David shouldn’t or couldn’t be sad, but he was only thinking of himself. When we have pity parties, we often become so self-consumed and self-

focused that we only think about ourselves and do not care about others. That was David. He should be thanking his army and showing gratitude for risking their lives. He needed to care about other people first.

...because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. 2 Samuel 19:6 (ESV)

The message you are sending people by crying for yourself instead of showing gratitude for other people is you would be glad if all of them were dead and your rotten son, who just caused the death of 20,000 people, was alive. As a leader, he needed to pull himself together and think about his job to lead others, not just about himself.

Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the LORD, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." 2 Samuel 19:7 (ESV)

What a reminder that for those of us in leadership, it is important not to let our personal pain eclipse our public leadership duties.

Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, "Behold, the king is sitting in the gate." And all the people came before the king. Now Israel had fled every man to his own home. 2 Samuel 19:8 (ESV)

David doesn't say anything. He was still brokenhearted, but at least he came out and took his public seat to show gratitude to the people.

One point of application that struck me as I looked at these final verses is that life is rough. It is easy in hard times to be sucked into a vortex of grief and self-pity. When we find ourselves there, a friend who can lovingly and gently snap us out of it is a gift from God. Joab may have been rough on David, but pulling him

out of his grief and encouraging him to focus on serving other people and not just grieving about himself was a good gift.

It reminds me of one friend of mine who went through a painful divorce a few years ago. At the time, I met with him every week for a year. This was the season of CrossWind's life when we built the new stage and painted the ceiling black. He told me he could sit home and feel sorry about himself, or he could come over and help. He didn't want his grief to turn him into a self-centered and isolated person. He wanted his divorce to make him more caring and loving for others, not less. If I have to cry, I can cry with a paintbrush in my hand. That was a man who handled his grief well. He didn't let it turn him into a selfish, isolated person.

### Applications

We covered a lot today. Let's summarize some of the things we learned.

1. **The consequences of sin are far greater and last longer than the pleasures of sin.** The repercussions of David's sin lasted for years, even though David's sin was forgiven, there were still lasting consequences. The consequences of his one-night affair was far worse than any pleasure.
2. **Be careful not to let our sadness turn into self-centeredness that keeps us from loving others.** David's self-centered grief almost led to the loss of his kingdom after God won a great victory.
3. **Absalom is an example of why it is foolish for children to rebel against their parents.** Teenagers and young adults, your friends will encourage you to rebel against your parents and to turn against them. They will tell you that your parents are foolish. Listen to me. That is a lie from the pit of hell. Your



parents love you more than anyone else in this world. They will do anything for you. They want what is best for you. The Bible tells us that a child rebelling against their parents is guaranteed to lead to disaster. It will always lead to a worse life, not a better one.

“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Ephesians 6:2–3 (ESV)

If you do not honor your parents, it will not go well with you. That is a promise.

The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. Proverbs 30:17 (ESV)

A bird picking out an eye is a painful mental picture. Those who mock their parents will end up dead and eaten by vultures on the side of the road.

**4. God is behind the scenes, caring for His people and rescuing them from disaster in ways they don't expect.** In the background, we saw God at work all over the place in this chapter as he saved David from certain death and took away Absalom's certain victory. God moved the heart of Absalom to choose foolish advice. He moved the hearts of wealthy men around David to have compassion on him in his time of need. He providentially fought against Absalom's army, even using the trees to slay more men than the sword. If God was at work saving his king and kingdom, we know God is at work behind the scenes in your life and mine, providing for us in our time of need. Most miraculously, God was at work when Jesus, the son of David, hung on a Roman cross. He was at work putting our sins on Jesus as he died in our place for our sins. Then, after three days, God was at work when Jesus rose

from the grave to new life, delivering us from the eternal damnation we rightfully deserve through our faith and trust in him.



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