

My Son, My Son!

Text: II Samuel 18:28-19:8

This morning I am certain that I am talking to at least 90 % or more families within the sound of my voice who have an Absalom in their family or extended family. In our text today David is informed that his troops have won against Absalom's rebellion, but he cannot rejoice because he is also told that his rebel son Absalom has been killed. David's prodigal is not coming home a repentant; his prodigal has already been buried. Once the news is given to David, there is not commentary that can make his grief any plainer than II Samuel 18:33: "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Again, in II Samuel 19:4: "But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The Bible is more relevant today than ever. The temptations for our youth to step into the world and abdicate our faith is stronger than ever. It is estimated that Absalom was 27 years of age. So much of life was ahead for him, now gone, without even a surviving son to carry his name.

When Barna Research's president David Kinnaman published his 2011 book, *You Lost Me*, we heard from many people (especially church leaders) who were shocked to learn that 59% of young adults with a Christian background had dropped out of church at some point during their 20s—many for just a time, but some for good.

Eight years later, research for Kinnaman's new book, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, reveals that the church dropout problem is still a problem. In fact, the percentage of young-adult dropouts has increased from 59% to 64%. Nearly two-thirds of U.S. 18–29-year-olds who grew up in church tell Barna they have withdrawn from church involvement as an adult after having been active as a child or teen.

The *Wall Street Journal* has an article in their recent publication entitled, "America Pulls Back From Values That Once Defined It." WSJ editor, Aaron Zitner reports, "Patriotism, religious faith, having children and other priorities that helped define the national character for generations are receding in importance to Americans, a new Wall Street Journal-NORC poll finds." Zitner went on to say, "I wouldn't say that their importance declined. I would say their importance in some cases collapsed." A student of culture, Dr. James Emery White commenting about these findings said, "Consider just two values that would have been deemed core to any American sensibility: patriotism and religion. In 1998, 70% considered patriotism to be very important. Another 62% said the same of religion. No more. In the recent polling, only 38% said patriotism was important to them, and only 39% felt that religion mattered. That's not a decline; that is a free fall. Those are not the only 'traditional' American values in decline. 'The share of Americans who say that having children, involvement in their community and hard work are very important has also fallen,' notes the WSJ piece by Aaron Zitner. 'Tolerance for others, deemed very important by 80% of Americans as recently as four years ago,' he adds, 'has fallen to 58% since then.'"

1. THE STAY

II Samuel 18:1-4

David's desire to go into battle was challenged. II Samuel 18:3, 4: "But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city. And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands."

No doubt David thought a thousand times that if he had gone into battle, Absalom's life could have been spared. Later in the chapter he gave the order. II Samuel 18:5: "And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom." I can imagine David saying, had I been with my men, no one, not even Joab would have defied my order.

Many parents live wondering what they could have done, what they should have done to prevent their child from growing up and going astray. The Bible says in Ezekiel 14:12-14, "The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD." Every one of us has volition. We are not robots. Just remember, although our hands seem tied, the Lord can be reached through prayer. Isaiah 59:1: "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear."

2. THE STRATEGY

II Samuel 18:5-8

David was the battle-tested warrior. He knew how to divide his troops and take ground. Even understanding how to use the geography was part of his genius in war. II Samuel 18:8: "For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." But there was more involved than David's expertise; he and his men were operating in the perfect will of God. I Chronicles 28:5: "And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel." There was no way Absalom was destined to be the king of Israel. That throne was assigned by the Lord to go to Solomon.

3. THE SUSPENSION

II Samuel 18:9-13

Absalom is suspended between Heaven and Earth (II Samuel 18:9), after his head gets lodged in the thick boughs of a great oak. There are two choices made. One is made by David's faithful soldier who would not compromise for one thousand shekels of silver. On the other hand, Joab is more than willing to compromise and defy the king's order. It is so very important to do right, whether King David is watching or not. It is even more important to do right, knowing that King Jesus is always watching. The soldier was wise enough to know that Joab would have taken his life to make himself

look good to David for chastising the young soldier who disobeyed David's order. Wicked Joab took matters into his hands believing himself too important for the king to chastise him.

4. THE KILLING

II Samuel 18:14-18

We are living in a paradigm that has become alarming. People are taking justice (or their interpretation of justice) into their own hands. As wicked as Absalom was in his rebellion and the deeds that surrounded his treasonous and even incestuous acts, one would think that Joab had a right to inflict capital punishment. The rule of law, however, was violated because David wanted Absalom to be dealt with gently and to be brought back home alive. That could have easily happened. Absalom was suspended in mid-air unable to defend himself. Joab and his men could have effortlessly obeyed the rule of law that the King had decreed. Nearly every time I study anything having to do with law, I see the holy commands of God. Joab should have realized to disobey the king was to disobey God. I Peter 2:17: "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." Compare with Romans 13:1, 3.

5. THE RUNNERS

II Samuel 18:19-30

Ahimaaz wanted to give the news of the battle's outcome, but he was not permitted. Cushai rather than Ahimaaz was the choice to carry the tidings or news of the battle. A couple of very practical points should be made. (A) Important news requires haste in delivery. (B) We always need to be sure we have the message.

6. THE NEWS

II Samuel 18:31-32

Job's heart was broken after having to bury all ten of his children. These words that he spoke could have just as easily been David's: "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me" (Job 3:25).

7. THE GRIEVING

II Samuel 18:33-19:8

Our king finds no solace in the victory, or comfort for his personal loss. Joab again "lowers," not "rises" to the occasion. His insensitivity is appalling. David would have come around to do what needed to be done. There were not going to be any more mutinies, for the people loved their king. II Samuel 19:2: "And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son." Jeremiah said in Lamentations 1:12a: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me...."

Conclusion: I see Jesus all through the Scriptures. I want to bring five contrasts in our story: the Sin, the Battle, the Silver, the Tree, and the Stones at the Grave.

-Pastor Pope-