

December 4, 2016  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: The Life of David  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## CONFIDENTLY WRONG 2 Samuel 14:1-33

There is a fine line between being confident and being arrogant. While confidence is appreciated by peers and necessary for leaders, arrogance is not. Sometimes it is difficult to discern which trait is exhibited until the results of the action or plan come to fruition. A confident person has generally weighed a situation, considered the pros and cons, determined what it will take to pull off success, and then being confident that he or she can accomplish the feat, goes after it with zeal. We appreciate that kind of spirit. The more a confident person follows this plan and finds success, the more confidence that person will generally demonstrate. Success breeds success.

On the other hand, an arrogant know-it-all appears to have confidence but does not. Instead of confidence, this kind of person is proud to a fault. This guy assumes he is always right. Whether he has considered the situation carefully, weighed the facts, or fairly contrasted the pros and cons is irrelevant to him. Why would he waste all that time and energy when he knows he is right. How does he know he is right? Because it is his idea. If it wasn't right, it wouldn't be his idea. Solomon's wisdom sayings reveal that a person like that is a fool. *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice (Proverbs 12:15). Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him (Proverbs 26:12).*

Joab was either confident or a foolish know-it-all. At times it appeared that he made very wise decisions, decisions that kept his king David from embarrassing situations. At other times, Joab seemed to be motivated by selfish reasons or laid groundwork on which to build his own esteem. Sometimes he even strikes us as a bull

in a china shop, running over everyone in his way to accomplish his desires. More than once David rebuked Joab and his brother with words like, *"What have I to do with you sons of Zeruah?" (2 Samuel 16:10).*

In this story, it appears that Joab had a good plan to bring about reconciliation between David and his exiled son Absalom. Reconciliation between conflicted parties is a great idea, right? It is always a righteous thing, isn't it? Not necessarily. It appears that after Joab got his way, and David brought Absalom home, Joab began to see Absalom's true character and had second thoughts about what he had accomplished. We know the whole story. We know that God used Joab's plan to exact justice on Absalom the murderer and also as one of those consequences that God had promised for David's sin of killing Uriah. God had warned that the sword would not depart from David's house. God would use Absalom's pride and ambition to partially fulfill that promise. And Joab was the connector that made it all happen. I wonder if Mr. Confidence, Joab, ever regretted his smashingly successful plan to reconcile Absalom and David?

### **Pretend to be . . . (vv.1-11).**

Joab had a plan as usual (vv.1-3). David's general was aware of his king's grief. *Now Joab the son of Zeruah knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom (v.1).* It was more than a longing in David's heart. We read in the previous chapter (v.37) that David mourned for Absalom.

We have learned in the David story that he was familiar with grief. David grieved because he sinned. *O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath! For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin (Psalm 38:1-3).* David grieved when his and Bathsheba's son died (12:16). David was angry and probably grieved when Amnon violated Tamar (13:21). David grieved when Absalom killed Amnon (13:31). Now David was grieving because Absalom was in exile.

We all have experienced grief on some level. How do we deal with it? God has a good plan for His people dealing with grief. When

the people in Nehemiah's day grieved over their sins, having heard God's law read, he told them, "*And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10). Jeremiah looked over the smoldering ruins of Jerusalem and concluded, "*Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD! Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven*" (Lamentations 3:39-41). He learned, "*You came near when I called on you; you said, 'Do not fear!' You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life*" (Lamentations 3:57-58). Even David understood this truth (assuming he wrote Psalm 119): "*My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!*" (Psalm 119:28).

God's plan for His people when we experience grief is to find His comfort in His Word as we fellowship with Him. Human pride and self-sufficiency often has an alternative plan to deal with sorrow because of sin. And often God arranges for proud humans to work their plans so that He can once again teach lessons about His own perfect righteousness.

That was the case, for Joab decided to fix the problem of David longing for Absalom. Or maybe, Joab's plan went beyond fixing that problem to address what he thought was a bigger potential problem. How would he do this? *And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, "Pretend to be a mourner and put on mourning garments. Do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead. Go to the king and speak thus to him." So Joab put the words in her mouth* (vv.2-3).

Maybe Joab remembered an earlier situation in which a sad story convinced David. God had sent Nathan to David with a story. Joab saw that it worked and took a similar path. He found a wise (shrewd, crafty, cunning) woman who lived about 10-12 miles south of Jerusalem. She must have had a reputation. In that she appears to be able to play the part of another quite well, maybe she was an actress in the local theater at Tekoa. She was not necessarily evil because the word can refer to skill and knowing how to make things work. But Joab knew she would be able to convince the grieving king. He hatched the story himself.

We could fairly conclude that there is a stark contrast between God's story related through Nathan and Joab's plan to use the woman of Tekoa to tell a story. This was the plan of an unrighteous man. David often commented on his unrighteousness. He was eventually executed because of his unrighteousness. More accurately, this looks like a contrast between God and Satan. It wasn't God's plan, but Joab's plan! Or was it? In reality God used Joab, maybe even inspired Joab to do this. It was all part of God fulfilling the promise through Nathan the prophet who God did send with the story about the stolen, slaughtered lamb. Joab only thought he was in control of the situation.

Hear the sad story (vv.4-11). The actress from Tekoa pretended to be a widow who was in trouble. She honored the king (which was probably genuine). *When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and paid homage and said, "Save me, O king." And the king said to her, "What is your trouble?"* In response to the king's question, the woman told the make-believe story as though it were true. A synopsis of verses four through seven have the woman telling about her one son who killed his brother, her other son. Now she had only one son and the rest of the clan sought to level justice against him. The problem was that God's law allowed for a relative of a murdered person to seek vengeance through death of the murderer. If the relatives were successful, the poor woman would be left alone with no sons, which was a precarious condition for a woman in that culture.

The wise king had a ready answer for this supposed dilemma. As Joab had anticipated, David quickly arrived at justice in this case. *Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you." And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be guiltless." The king said, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again"* (vv.8-10). The king had authority to protect the murderer and so he promised to protect the guilty man.

The woman was not done yet. The sly story-teller wanted a more direct promise for protection. *Then she said, "Please let the king invoke the LORD your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more, and my son be not destroyed." He said, "As the LORD lives,*

*not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground” (v.11).* Now David swore an oath invoking the name of the LORD. That was the response Joab and the woman counted on. Now they had David right where they wanted him.

### **Application of the Story (vv.12-20).**

The connivers were confident they understood God’s will for His people. Confident Joab’s plan was for the woman to trap David in a double standard, which she did. *Then the woman said, “Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.” He said, “Speak.” And the woman said, “Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God?” (vv.12-13a).* According to her accusation, Joab and the woman decided what was good and what was bad for the nation of God’s people. That was a scary and foolish boldness. It appears that the woman simply spun her conversation off from David’s choice to invoke the name of the LORD in his oath to her. It is as if she said, “Okay, you want to talk about the LORD, what about the LORD’s people?”

The woman turned the tables on the king and accused him of doing something that would damage the people of the LORD. Of course we know this is all Joab’s plan and concern. What he feared the damage would be we cannot say for sure. Probably he feared that David being at conflict with Absalom would result in a civil war, the nation being split by Absalom. The question for Joab was how to solve the problem of conflict. The simple answer was (and generally still is) unity! In order for unity to happen, David must humble himself, get off his high horse of not accepting Absalom the murderer, and embrace him. Joab was sure that if the king would just humble himself everything was going to work out for the good of the people.

But wait! Did David really convict himself by his response to the story? The woman said he did. *“For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again” (v.13b).* Was her story and David’s situation really the same? No doubt Joab was hoping that this would be a repeat of the prophet Nathan thing. Nathan had told the story about the rich man stealing the poor man’s lamb and killing it. When

David condemned the thief and murderer, Nathan pointed out that David was guilty of the exact same sin.

But there is a difference between that story and conviction and this situation. “Nathan’s parable was designed to rouse the king’s conscience as against his feelings; the woman of Tekoah’s, as prompted by Joab, to rouse his feelings as against his conscience.” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*). In the Bathsheba/Uriah situation, David’s conscience needed to be stirred so that he would conclude as he did, “I have sinned against the LORD.” In David’s situation with Absalom, his conscience was clear regarding banishment. Joab wanted David’s feelings toward Absalom to overrule his conscience. So the woman pointed out that the king was responsible for “banishing” his son. He was responsible for Absalom living in Geshur the past three years. Bad king!

Again the woman accused David of a double standard. She pointed out to David the fact that *We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast (v.14).* This was her argument: “As you well know from your own experience David, God doesn’t always punish as the sinner deserves!” Did David keep Absalom at arm’s length because he knew that God’s law required Absalom’s execution by the avenger of blood? Now this woman and Joab attempted to override God’s law and put David in a very awkward position. It is true that God can make exceptions to His law as He did for David. *David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Samuel 12:13).* With that evidence in hand, Joab and the woman really put the pressure on David.

You might have learned from experience that where logic and good arguments fail, flattery will seal the deal (vv.15-20). The woman must have believed that. She said, *“Now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid, and your servant thought, ‘I will speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant. For the king will hear and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the heritage of God.’ And your servant thought, ‘The word of my lord the king will set me at rest,’ for my*

*lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil. The LORD your God be with you!” (vv.15-17).*

Surely the king did not desire death for Absalom. He would really love to have him home. As if to say, “Listen to your heart David!” And surely the king is as wise as the angel of the LORD. *Then the king answered the woman, “Do not hide from me anything I ask you.” And the woman said, “Let my lord the king speak.” The king said, “Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?” The woman answered and said, “As surely as you live, my lord the king, one cannot turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has said. It was your servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant. In order to change the course of things your servant Joab did this. But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth” (vv.18-20).*

But was Joab really interested in the will of God and, therefore, the welfare of the kingdom? Joab planned to convince David by drawing on past experience of David being forgiven and restored. It is true that David sinned (committed murder through warfare) and God forgave rather than punish. In comparison, it is also true that Absalom also committed murder through the hand of his servant. But follow the evidence of the Scripture account of Absalom’s case and discover an important difference.

Absalom fled to Geshur, a small kingdom in Syria near Damascus. He went there because Maacah, his mother, was the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. Therefore, Absalom was among his own relatives. It seems likely that his servants, who helped him murder Amnon, were with him. We do know that King Talmai and his people served false gods. Was Absalom comfortable with that? His subsequent life indicates a heart of idolatry with no fear of God.

Furthermore, this is a good spot for us to stop and consider the important lesson taught in this story. The one small issue that is missing, the one difference between David’s sin and Absalom’s sin, is the matter of confession, repentance, and forgiveness. David sinned, acknowledged his sin, repented, and God forgave him. There is not one shred of evidence that the same was true regarding Absalom.

That brings up a very important principle regarding God’s plan for human relationships. There can be no unity, no resolution of the conflict until confession, repentance, and forgiveness takes place. Here is the problem we face regularly in real life. An offense occurs because of sin. The offender is now at odds with the victim of his or her sin. Time passes and some well-meaning person puts pressure on the offended person to resolve the conflict. The well-meaning person rebukes the offended person by telling him or her that God has forgiven their sin and they should forgive their offender. But there is a problem in that the offender has never acknowledged any wrong doing, the offender has never repented of wrongdoing but continues to live a life of sin, and the offender has never asked for forgiveness. The offended person is righteous to conclude once and for all in his heart that he has laid forgiveness on the table. Any time the offender wants to come and receive that forgiveness, he or she can. But the conflict will not truly be resolved until the offender seeks forgiveness and the offended one offers it. There can be no unity until there is a discussion and acknowledgment of sin and offense.

Joab and the woman from Tekoa missed this very important point. That small, overlooked point would become the huge, monstrous point that really would cause civil war. If Joab was concerned that unresolved conflict between David and Absalom would result in civil war, he was as wrong as he could be to try to avoid civil war while avoiding confession, repentance, and forgiveness. He and the woman forced David to feel guilty enough to just push away God’s principle for unity and pretend it didn’t matter. It mattered.

### **A Bad Decision in Response to the Parable (vv.21-33).**

In response to the pressure from Joab and the woman, David opened the door for disaster (vv.21-27). *Then the king said to Joab, “Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.” And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant.” So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. And the king said, “Let him dwell*

*apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence.” So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king’s presence (vv.21-24).*

Under pressure the king relented. He gave permission for Absalom to come home to Jerusalem. But Absalom’s return did not indicate that all was well. David still held him at arm’s length. Was he waiting, hoping, for confession and repentance? Unlike many presidents who pardon criminals without blinking, David was concerned about how unconditional pardon of a cold-blooded unconfessed, unrepentant murderer would look to the people. For all practical purposes, Absalom might as well have stayed in Geshur.

Suddenly in the story we have this parenthesis that is important to the rest of the story. We learn that the unrepentant offender was very popular with the people. *Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And 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. There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a beautiful woman. (vv.25-27).* Absalom and his daughter were the “beautiful people.” Physical attractiveness is “attractive” to the masses. That spells trouble.

As wisdom would expect, disaster took root and grew as Absalom’s character was coming to the surface (vv.28-32). He lived in Jerusalem out of fellowship with his father for two years. *So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king’s presence (v.28).* After two years, Absalom demanded that Joab get him an audience with the king. *Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. Then he said to his servants, “See, Joab’s field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.” So Absalom’s servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?” Absalom answered Joab, “Behold, I sent word to you, ‘Come here, that I may send you to the king’” (vv.29-32a).*

So why didn’t Joab want to meet with Absalom? By now Absalom was already showing his true colors. Surely his servants who had been part of the murder at the sheep shearing were supporting him. He was wildly popular with the people. He was gathering personal support and criticizing the king and his cabinet. Surely David’s choices and wrong actions over the years had made plenty of enemies who were looking for a point to rally against the king. In light of this evidence, it is likely that already confident Joab saw that he had made a mistake. Now he was stuck. He could not go forward and arrange a meeting between the unrepentant offender and the king. He could not go backward and send Absalom back to Geshur. He would just ignore the request and hope that Absalom decided to move on his own. He did not and would not.

The pressure mounted, David was put in a lose/lose situation and ended up kissing a snake (vv.32-33). Absalom had to get his foot in the palace door. *Absalom answered Joab, “Behold, I sent word to you, ‘Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, “Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.” Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death’” (v.32).* David was stuck also. Either he had to apply justice (execution) or he had to banish him or he had to stifle his conscience and accept the murderer. None of those were good options toward the handsome man who had become so popular during the two years he was in town.

Looking beyond all the conflict and smoke and mirrors, we have to be convinced that it was God’s plan for Absalom to take control. *Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom (v.33).* Our wisdom cries out at this point, “No, don’t do it.” It was too late. The damage had been done by Joab’s confident but errant plan. And yet this was God’s plan for His people.

Often the simple is better than the complex. The simple principle of God’s Word is this: Conflict is resolved when there is confession of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. If we choose to ignore those requirements, we might be able to establish an uneasy truce, but it is likely that there will be future conflict. We need to be sure that

our confidence is in the simple truths of God's Word, not in our abilities to concoct successful negotiations.