

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

Call to Worship: Psalm 75:1

1st Scripture: 2 Samuel 13:23-39

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 14:1-24

Hymn Insert: *Shout to the Lord*

Hymn Insert: *Power of the Cross*

Hymn Insert: *Every Promise of Your Word*

Introduction:

After two full years of biding his time, Absalom has craftily organized a means of avenging his sister Tamar, against their brother, Amnon, who has forcefully violated Tamar. At an arranged "sheep shearing festival," which offered an atmosphere of great joy and celebration, Absalom had his servants slay Amnon, when he was good and merry with wine, and therefore, when he least expected it. Following this, Absalom fled to Geshur (on the east side of the Sea of Galilee), where he remained under the care of his grandfather, Talmai, who was the king of Geshur. And he remained there for three years, until David's mourning for his son, Amnon, had subsided. And then, in verse 39, we read, "And King David longed to go to Absalom. For he had been comforted concerning Amnon, because he was dead."

Well, this morning, as we move into chapter 14, we find that Joab begins to perceive the growing concern, which David has in his heart, for his distant son, Absalom. He recognizes that David is in a bit of a bind, because, on the one hand, David greatly misses Absalom, and would desire to have him safely back in Jerusalem, but on the other hand, David could not justify bringing Absalom back, without exercising justice, and having his son put to death, for the capital offense of premeditated murder. And so, Joab develops a plan, which would seek to rescue David from his conscious quandary, so that David could be reunited with his son, and thereby alleviate the deep sorrow, which was presently weighing down his heart.

I. Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

What then is Joab's plan? His main goal is to present the king with a situation, likened to his own, whereby the king could consciously allow for the law to be bypassed, under certain, unique conditions. In other words, Joab wanted to present a scenario where even pre-meditated murder could be excused, at times, in unique circumstances, similar to what has happened between Absalom and Amnon. If David could justify an individual in a similar situation, then he

could justify his own excusing of Absalom, and thereby, avoid seeing the necessity for executing the death penalty on Absalom, should he return.

How then does Joab present David with a like situation, and in such a way, that it would be very difficult for David to investigate the matter, before making a conclusive judgment? He sends for a wise woman (one who could interact with the king, convincingly, about a made up story), who lives some 10-12 miles away, south of Jerusalem, which would prevent the king from investigating the matter, in any immediate and convenient sense. And he has this woman, come before the king, pleading for his help, regarding a so-called personal dilemma that she was facing, which was disguised to *allegedly* identify with the king's own dilemma.

And here is the story. The woman was a widow, whose husband had died, at some point in the past. She had two sons, who had gotten into a bit of a squabble, out in the field (where no one was present to break it up), and one of them struck the other, so that his brother had died. And now, because of this, the whole family was calling for justice, ordering the woman to deliver her son over to them, so that they could execute him, for killing his brother. But, if they were to do this, they would eliminate the woman's only heir, and prevent her husband from having a continuing name (or a remnant) on the earth. In other words, the remaining son was her only means of propagating her husband's name, and thereby, securing his inheritance for future generations. And so, her appeal to the king then, would be for him to bypass the normal demands of the law, and to extend mercy, in light of her unique circumstances.

Now, when she presents her dilemma to David, David's immediate response is wise, and something we all ought to take note of. It could be very easy to get caught up in the emotion of the thing; to feel deeply sorry for the woman and her circumstances, and to use your power to grant the woman her request, without carefully thinking things through, and further investigating the situation. And so, David wisely states in verse 8, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you." Clearly, this was a complicated matter, and David would have wanted to get input from others, while perhaps, investigating things further, before making any kind of a set decision on the matter. Now, this poses a serious problem for the woman, because her story is not true, and she is trying to work her way into leading the king to deal with his own present dilemma, concerning Absalom. Should David take the time to look further into this, Joab's whole plan will be botched.

But brethren, before we move on to see how the woman responds, which will confirm that she is indeed a "wise woman," quick on her feet, as it were, and able to press Joab's plan to its desired end, just take hold of one quick application here, for a moment. Let David's response here, move us to lay hold of a helpful tool, when seeking to give advice or counsel to others.

We spoke a little bit about counsel already, particularly, about how dangerous, even well meant, but bad counsel, can be, when we pondered Jonadab's lethal counsel to Amnon. But, see here in David; see here, even in the person of a king and a ruler, the need to embrace a humble willingness to get back to someone, concerning a difficult matter, which they have brought to you, for advice. Sometimes, we can be prone toward presuming that those who trust us, enough to seek our counsel/advice, will somehow see us as unwise (or lose respect for us), if we cannot answer them right away, concerning a given matter. We want people to seek advice from us. We enjoy being helpful to others, and we want them to come back to us for counsel, in the future. And so, we can easily feel the pressure, to give them "something," even if we are truly uncertain about a matter. But, let us learn from David here, that there is a place to say, "Hey, can I pray about that and get back to you? Can I think about that a bit more, before responding. I just want to make sure that I do not offer you any careless counsel that can potentially move you in the wrong direction. If the person seeking your counsel cannot respect that kind of wisdom, then let them go to someone else for immediate counsel, but don't be the cause of their harm, because you feel the urgent need to tell them "something," in any immediate sense. Anyway, David, of course, is dealing with a judgment here, but I think that the general principle could very well apply to "giving counsel/advice," as well.

But notice then, how the woman responds in verse 9: "And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, 'My lord, O king, let the iniquity be on me and on my father's house, and the king and his throne be guiltless.'"

In looking to secure an immediate judgment, the woman states, as it were, "O King, if the information I have given you is false in any way, or if there is any doubt as to whether or not it is right to grant mercy to my son, let this iniquity be on me and my father's house. Let the guilt fall on me, and not you, O king. I will bear the blame before God for your ruling, but please don't delay this decision."

King David then responds, "Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you anymore" (vs. 10). Now, this would seem more than sufficient to the cause of the

woman, because here, her son was granted the king's protection. Should her other family members bother her anymore, or try to compel her to give them her son, by any measure of force, she could tell them to see the king, and he would ensure that they bother her no more. However, she pushes things a step further, so as to fully lasso the king's conscience, concerning his own son, Absalom, when she brings the arrow over to King David. And so, she adds, "Please let the king remember the Lord your God, and do not permit the avenger of blood to destroy anymore, lest they destroy my son" (vs. 11a).

Here then, the woman wants to secure an oath from David, ensuring that he will, in this case, bypass the law, and prevent the avenger of blood from harming her son, even though he did kill his brother. If she can get him to do this, then she has him, and then, she can flip the switch and bring the king's attention, toward the matter concerning his own son, allegedly giving him "just warrant" to bypass the law, in the case of his son, Absalom. And indeed, she secures such an oath. In verse 11b, we are told, "And [King David] said, 'As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.'"

Following this then, the woman requests the king's attention concerning one other matter, and here, being given his approval to speak on, she will tie in, her own supposed dilemma with the king's. And, I believe that the essence of her argument (given in verses 13-17) goes something like this: "O King, if you are willing to do this for me, a poor widow; if you could yet justify my cause, and let my son live, exempting him from the normal course of the law, then how could you not, for the sake of our nation even, bring home your royal son, who continues to remain banished in a heathen country, apart from the blessings of God's people? Was not his provocation, after what had happened to his sister, at least, comparable to my son's? Are there not additional factors, which would weigh into the equation, when considering the nature of his crime? And furthermore, we are all going to die in a short time, anyway. Does not God Himself, make allowances at times, allowing some to live, who do not necessarily deserve it? Does He not provide means, to bring back those who are banished from Him? O king, I have come here today to make my request known, concerning my own son, but people said that you would not hear me, especially because of what you have done, in the case of your own son. But I knew that you would hear my request, and act righteously for my cause. I knew that you would not allow me and my son to be destroyed from our inheritance. For you are like an angel of God, discerning good and evil. But it is not good then, that you do not do the same for your own son,

whom the people also hold in high regard. May the Lord, your God, be with you, as you consider my words.

In saying these things, the woman has effectively gotten her point across, but, at the same time, David is now on to her. He recognizes that Joab has put her up to this. [Read verses 18-19a]. And so, the King now realizes that he was duped by the woman, leading him to convict his own conscious, concerning his dealings with Absalom. And suspecting that Joab was behind all of this, he asks the woman if that is the case. And she affirms, but not without bathing her words in much flattery toward the king, so as to ease any possible frustration he might have toward her, in the matter. In verses 19-20, we see again that Joab has indeed, chosen a wise woman to handle this task. [Read verses 19-20]. "Oh King, I knew that nothing could get past you! You have the wisdom of an angel of God! Indeed, Joab set this up, so that you would be willing to bring your son back, to be reconciled to you."

Finally, David then goes to Joab, and agrees to allow his son to come back. And with his own great show of flattery, Joab falls down before the king, thanks him, and expresses gratitude for having his request granted. Realistically speaking, however, Joab was doing all of this for King David. Joab had no personal, strong attachment to Absalom, as we will see in the weeks ahead. Needless to say, Joab then goes to Geshur, retrieves Absalom, and brings him back to Jerusalem. However, although the king allows Absalom to return to Jerusalem, to his own house, he himself is not ready to see him. He is still struggling with all that has happened, and cannot bring himself to face Absalom, at this point. And so, he orders Joab to keep Absalom from seeing his face, at least, for the time being.

And Lord willing, we will pick up the narrative, from verses 25-33, next time.

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Brethren, having worked through this lengthy portion of Scripture, let us now conclude our time with a few closing thoughts and applications:

1) First, note that we do want to be careful not to be so bent on keeping the "letter" of the law, while neglecting to recognize the "spirit" of it. Joab was right to recognize that not everything with respect to the law, is cut and dry. Not everything is black and white. There are gray areas, which ought to be carefully and prayerfully considered, while seeking wisdom, before coming to any certain conclusions concerning a matter.

Our Lord pointed this out to the Pharisees and the religious leaders, when they sought to condemn his disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath. In the ordinary sense, no work ought to be done on the Sabbath, but there are exceptions, at times. And in the case of our Lord and His disciples, as they were traveling about, preaching the Gospel, there was good warrant for them to nourish their tired and hungry bodies, along the way. The preservation of life, trumped the general Sabbath law, in that case and example. What would have been sinful for the average farmer, who ought to have had food prepared the day before, was justifiable for the Lord's disciples.

And our Lord's defense was not merely suited for a New Covenant context. The same principle would have been in force, for the Israelites in the Old Covenant. In fact, the Lord uses an Old Covenant example to make His point, in this regard (Matthew 12:1ff), when He tells of how David had even ate the showbread, with his men, which was not permitted. Only the priests were permitted to eat that holy bread. But Ahimelech, the priest, made an exception, on that one occasion, didn't he? And that, unto the necessary preservation of life. Under any normal circumstance, Ahimelech and David, would have greatly offended God, by taking such actions.

And so, brethren, we need to be careful with our use of the law. Now, we ought to be lawful (as I will seek to further confirm, in a moment), but we must also be careful to examine the facts, and to ensure that we do not trample the spirit of the law, by binding ourselves to the letter of it. And in fact, those who cement themselves to the letter of the law, will ultimately find themselves failing to treat people like people, and precious souls, like precious souls. And more than likely, they will find themselves adding, even to the letter of the law, so as to further ensure that they keep the letter of it. And that is exactly what the Pharisees had done. Indeed, the Pharisaic order started with good intentions, seeking to contend with the gross, secular influence of the pagan Greeks, which was infiltrating, and blending with the Jewish religion. But their zeal, sadly, carried them off to the other extreme, where they cast out poor, lost and needy souls, and clung to their own so-called "self-righteousness." And so, there is room for weighty exceptions, when seeking to apply the Law of God into the life of God's people. Not everything is cut and dry, pressed to the letter. And so, Joab attached his scheme to a legitimate principle. However, that does not necessarily affirm that Absalom's case, was legitimately an exception, does it? This then brings us to our second application for this morning.

2) Let us be careful, not to allow our emotions or feelings, to cloud the reality of what God's Law clearly affirms, by creating supposed "spirit of the law" exceptions, as a means of escaping the true intent of the law. And brethren, I believe, that this is what Joab had done here, in his schematic appeal to David. And David, whose heart was already longing after Absalom, would have been more than prone toward taking the bait, in this regard. Brethren, note a few things that I believe would wholly discredit Joab's case, here:

a: First of all, Joab is the last person, who ought to be considered a proponent of God's Law, in any sense, but most particularly when dealing with the area of "justified killing." Joab himself has proven to be a murderer with no regard for God's Law. He had already murdered Abner in cold blood. He partook in the murder of Uriah, with no thought to question David's order, to have Uriah deserted in the front lines. And later on, we will find him to be the one, who kills Absalom, when Absalom is absolutely defenseless, and that, against the king's order. And finally, he will also later murder Amasa, in cold blood. This is not the guy to turn to, for wisdom, regarding, when it is justifiable to spare the life of a murderer. Joab had very little, if any, regard for the Law of God. And so, it would have done David much good, to further evaluate things, once he found out that Joab was the one, who had fed the woman this entire scheme.

b: Now, while realizing that the woman's story could not be identical to David's, lest the scheme be too easily discovered by David, the woman's alleged dilemma was actually quite different, in at least one significant way. There were no witnesses, who could report exactly what had happened between her two sons. There were many witnesses, who saw the very premeditated actions of Absalom. It may very well have been the case, that the woman's surviving son, had killed his brother in self-defense. There was no indication that his actions were premeditated. And so, he had hope, at a City of Refuge. In other words, the law did offer him protection, in some respect, at least until his case was better considered. And again, with no witnesses present, he may very well have been cleared. Clearly, Absalom's actions could not have been deemed self-defense. In fact, his motive was clear. He was exercising revenge, based upon an act; albeit a serious and terrible act, which had happened two years earlier. The woman's dilemma involved a tragic squabble, which turned deadly, but there was no known, lengthy time gap, where the one son had fomented a retaliatory hatred for his brother.

And so, the situations differ in a very significant way.

c: There really was no way that David could justify sparing Absalom. The facts were clearly out in the open. There were several witnesses. The motive was clear, and the murder was unjustifiable. There was no legitimate "gray area," within which David could justify Absalom's murderous actions. Even in the case of the woman's sons, barring what I have already said about the evidence, David ought not to have cleared her living son, for the cause of preserving her dwindling heritage. What kind of a precedent does it set, when justice is set aside for that kind of a reason? Again, more than likely, David was letting his emotions, and his natural concern for the woman, and his son, and perhaps, even the popular desire of the people to have Absalom back, to cloud his judgment, which ought to have been governed by the very clear teachings of God's Word. And because of this, David will now further have to deal with the treason of his son, who will continue to exemplify a lack of concern for justice, when he seeks to take David's kingdom from him, with the intention of murdering David, as well. And this will lead to Absalom's own death, and further grief for David, anyway.

[Note as well, David's own sin against Uriah, for which he was graciously pardoned, may have also, to David's fault, weakened his enforcement of the Law, which he himself had broken. David would not be justified in doing this, but he may have been vulnerable toward doing it. God grants mercy to whomever He will. That is His divine prerogative, which Christ secured in His particular atonement]

And so, brethren, let us be careful, not to allow our emotions to trump the very clear intentions of God's Law. We can easily justify our wrongs, or the wrongs of others, when there are emotional strings attached to any given circumstance. Consider how difficult it must be, to be involved with the excommunication of your own wayward, rebellious family member. May God give us the grace to stand upon His Word, and not to love, even father or mother or sister or brother, more than Him! Needless to say, much prayer, accompanied by the seeking of wise counsel, must be secured, when dealing with unclear matters related to God's Moral Law. There has to be a proper striving after the "spirit of God's Law," (the true intentions of it), as we walk through the challenging path of life. And this often takes much work, guidance and prayer.

[Note: the challenge of dealing with disciplinary matters in the church].

3) Finally, note the irony here, in that, David was unwilling to administer proper justice, against his son, for the crimes of his son, but our God was firm in administering justice, against His Son, for the crimes of His people. If nothing else, brethren, consider the majestic glory of

God, who was willing to do, what David would not do, and that for a people, who are naturally no better than Absalom. Absalom gets off free, for killing the king's firstborn son. Our King's firstborn Son is convicted and condemned, so that we can get off free. Just a profound irony, to consider the extent that God would go, to serve justice, on our behalf, when we are the guilty parties!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25