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The Death of a Bad Man

On October 7, 2001, almost six years ago, I preached a sermon titled, *The Death of a Good Man*. It was my eighteenth sermon in this pulpit.

In the sermon *The Death of a Good Man* we studied David's attempts to deal with his sin. When it became obvious that all the manipulation in the world would not work, the king resorted to murder. And so at a time when things couldn't have been better for the people of God, their king planned and carried out the death of a man who both lived and died to protect his king.

This morning I want to change the focus and look with you at - *The Death of a Bad Man*. Specifically I want to look at the details surrounding the rebellion of Absalom and his resultant death. As we will not get to this passage in our current study of Samuel,¹ I certainly wouldn't want to leave Samuel without first considering this event.

The Background

Following the horrible rule of Saul² God raised up David to rule over Israel. Now you probably know that David was a man after God's own heart. He was a man of great faith. He was also one who never could sit idly-by so long as God and His glory were being profaned.

¹It is my plan to move on to a different book of the Bible once we've finished 1 Samuel.

² This has been and will continue to be the subject of this pulpit for many months to come.

These things characterized David's entire life, except that time when in the summer of his life. The Bible describes this time as the time when kings went out to battle and David felt the need to stay home. It was at this time that he went out on his balcony to look over the city and saw a young maiden bathing in her garden. This is when David called her to himself, and together they committed adultery.

David embarked on a death spiral, a journey of self-destruction. Before he knew it he had lived a lie. He endeavored to manipulate. As such, he became ruthless³ and his body wasted away.⁴

When David found that this devilish plan to hide his sin did not work, he resorted to murder. And amazingly he would have gotten away with it, except for the penetrating glance of God.

And so on no particular day when David was seated in his judgment seat, Nathan the prophet approached seeking the council of his king. It seemed that a wealthy man needed a meal to feed some unexpected guests who had just arrived in town. Rather than consuming one of his own sheep, of which there were hundreds, this wealthy farmer took the lone sheep of his neighbor. Now to make matters worse the lamb he took wasn't one of the lambs in the pasture grown for its wool or meat, the lamb was "the family pet" that ate and slept with the family. In fact, Nathan said that the ewe was like a daughter to the man.⁵

Hearing this awful story, David fell into a rage.

2 Samuel 12:5, "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:"

It was then that Nathan identified the wealthy man.

2 Samuel 12:7-12, "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

Brothers and sisters that is exactly what happened. God raised up a rival to David's throne. And this rival would overthrow the king, take his wives as his own, and proclaim that Israel was under a new administration. However, what I don't think David ever imagined was that this "rival" would be Absalom!

³ Compare 2 Samuel 12:5

⁴ Compare Psalm 32

⁵ Compare 2 Samuel 12:3

The Treachery

2 Samuel 15:1-6, “And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.”

Absalom was a shrewd and patient individual, David's sin saw to that. Not only was he as good looking as you can get (no one could compare in all Israel) in fact his looks were dashing.⁶ He was tall. He was handsome. He had flowing locks of hair, the epitome of his prideful existence!⁷ And for nearly forty years, Absalom labored to steal the hearts of Israel from his father, David.⁸

Absalom worked in the most cunning way imaginable. He sat at the gate of the city as people came to the King for judgment in civil matters- issues like these:

- My neighbor says he owns the land that I have been farming for years.
- My business partner won't pay his portion of the bills.
- My wife is unfit for marriage. Am I authorized to divorce her?⁹

Now if the people were Jewish, he then would inquire as to their story, their claim. This was ingenious for he had a fifty percent chance of befriending the losing side. And in those cases where the one Absalom befriended was on the losing side, Absalom would begin his devilish work.

- David said what?
- You know, I love my dad. But you've got to be kidding me.
- You know what it is, don't you? He's getting old. His judgment is a little skewed.
- I'll tell you what, if I were king — and someday I will be — I would have sided with you.
- In fact, take this money... no I don't need it. Take this money and buy yourself a good farm.
- And don't bow before me; I am as you. Don't treat me like you would my dad!

By introducing the possibility that David was not fit to be king, and then by acting like a king to the losing side, Absalom stole the heart of many an Israelite away from David. So after forty years of this treachery, Absalom decided that the time was right to act. He requested the king's approval to attend a worship service in Hebron.¹⁰ Then he passed the word to those loyal to him, which by now was an army, that when the signal was given they were to pronounce Absalom as king in Hebron.¹¹

⁶ Compare 2 Samuel 14:25

⁷ Compare 2 Samuel 14:26

⁸ Some manuscripts say four years. Commentaries are divided on whether this is four or forty years.

⁹ Compare 2 Samuel 12, 14:4-7 for an actual example.

¹⁰ Recall that he was under house arrest on account of the murder of Amnon (David's first born and heir to the throne).

Compare 2 Samuel 13; 14:24-28

¹¹ Compare 2 Samuel 15:7-10

The coup grew in strength. Many of David's closest friends were now siding with his son including Ahithophel¹² David's most trusted advisor.¹³ In the end David was chased out of Jerusalem. Absalom, at the advice of Ahithophel, took David's harem and lay with them in broad day-light (which in that day was how you pronounced that you were the new king). And the boy that David thought would be his most peace-loving child¹⁴ and thus the least suspected of such treachery now became his most effective enemy.

Absalom did not remain as king. Joab, David's General, mounted a counter attack whereby Absalom was killed and David was able to retake his throne. And that brings us to Absalom's death, the death of this bad man.

The Death

2 Samuel 18:6-15, "So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim; Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. 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.

"And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away. And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak. And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle. And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom. Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me. Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak. And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him."

I am not going to say much on this verse- it speaks for itself. David wanted Absalom taken alive. But Joab knew that Israel and justice needed him dead.

The Pathetic Mourning

2 Samuel 18:31-19:3, "And, behold, Cushy came; and Cushy said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. And the king said unto Cushy, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushy answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. And the king was much

¹² Ahithophel may have been Bathsheba's grandfather. Compare 2 Samuel 11:3; 23:34

¹³ Compare 2 Samuel 15:12

¹⁴ Absalom means, "Father of peace," and was so named because this was what was expected of him.

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!”

“And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. 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. And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.”

It is obvious that David did not blame his son. For what had happened in his life was just as God promised years before when Nathan rebuked the king.¹⁵ Yet in spite of David's self-loathing, blame, and guilt, we know the truth... Absalom was not forced to rebel against David; he delighted in his rebellion.

Here is a snap-shot of Absalom's vanity.

2 Samuel 18:18, “Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.”

Absalom actually had at least three sons.¹⁶ Yet evidently none of them were willing¹⁷ to build a monument to commemorate the greatness of their father. So Absalom obliged them, showing us where his heart lay!

Truly Absalom was no innocent pawn in the outworking of God's divine providence. No, what he did was despicable. He not only rebelled against David, but He also rebelled against God. In fact, read the story of his life and you will see many acts of violence and rebellion against God.¹⁸ Absalom was

- Vengeful.
- A man of wrath.
- Manipulative.
- Glory hungry.
- Proud.
- Murderous.

Truly Absalom was a wretched, selfish, and arrogant man who, on account of his sin, deserved to die.

Thus when David's tears are measured against this truth, they are seen in all their folly and shame.¹⁹ These tears not only trampled underfoot justice — and so God's glory — but they also marginalized the sacrifice and courage of all who fought and died for the king. And that is why we read of the rebuke of Joab.

¹⁵ Compare 2 Samuel 12

¹⁶ Compare 2 Samuel 14:27

¹⁷ If they were too young or had died, the text would read differently here. Rather the indication is that to Absalom he had no son — the implication is that Absalom had disowned them!

¹⁸ The following is taken from the accounts of Absalom's life as found in 2 Samuel 13:20-39; 14:25-27; 15-16, 18.

¹⁹ After 2 Samuel 12, we see a different David. His is the passive David- waiting for the shoe of God's judgment to drop. The result is that David became a weak, passive, indecisive, spineless ruler. Certainly, he did not resemble the man who killed Goliath.

2 Samuel 19:5-7, “And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now.”

Joab was saying, “David get off your seat of mourning and act like a king. If you don't uphold justice, you will loose your kingdom.”

Such are the events surrounding the death of this bad man. And again I must emphasize that Absalom was not a victim. He was a willing participant in an act of treachery so great that it smacks of Satan's rebellion.

Satan was THE most glorious and beautiful of all angels.²⁰ In fact, so much so that he came to think that he deserved the worship which belongs only to God.²¹ And so he rebelled against God, and sought to ascend the throne of the Universe²² but God put him down.²³

There is very little difference between what inspired Satan, and what inspired Absalom- BOTH SOUGHT THE THRONE OF CHRIST! As a result, God in His providence hung Absalom on a tree and there had him killed for his rebellion, a rebellion which ultimately was directed at God!

Isn't this a most incredible story?

It belongs on a Hollywood screen unedited and unchanged. And yet why has this been recorded and placed in Scripture? What is the message? What is God telling us here?

No doubt there are many themes and exhortations that could be derived from this account, but there is one that is so glaring that I think it has been missed by most of us to date. To show you this theme, however you must understand that all that God has deigned to record in Scripture was given to teach us about

- Christ, John. 5:39-40.
- Ourselves, Romans 4:23-24; 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11.
- The Kingdom of God, Psalm 78:5-8.
- The nature of the messianic reign and rule of our Lord, Colossians 2:17.

Accordingly, when we looked at 2 Samuel 11 and "The Death of a Good Man"- Uriah the Hittite- we saw that Uriah was a type of Christ. Uriah carried the note which demanded his own death yet carrying it in love for the one who commissioned him. This is a shadow of the note that Christ bore on the cross.²⁴

Likewise in this one application we must see that Absalom is not a type of Christ, BUT THE tupos/type of man. Absalom is the epitome of what we are and deserve as sinners before God.

²⁰ Compare Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:8; and Revelation 9:1

²¹ Compare Isaiah 14:13

²² Compare Isaiah 14:14

²³ Compare Isaiah 14:15-17

²⁴ Compare Colossians 2:14

- Like Absalom have we not sought the throne of Christ?
- Have we not in our independence thrown off Christ's rule in favor of our own?
- Have we not sought the praises of men?
- Have we not longed for followers- men and women who would adore us and accept us as did Absalom?
- Have we not gathered people around us who would
 - Affirm our opinions?
 - Support our sin?
 - Accept our failings?
- Are we not guilty of manipulating people to advance our cause?
- And will it not be
 - Our glory.
 - Our pride.
 - The thing in which we take most pleasure. which in the end will trip us up and ensnare us- as did Absalom's hair?
- If God should deign not to deliver us, what will be the penalty for such rebellion and wickedness?

The penalty for our wickedness is hanging on a tree on account of our curse! Don't miss a most incredible truth. In Galatians 3:13 we read that Christ became a curse for us because "it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

Now the Old Testament reference for Galatians 3:13 is Deuteronomy 21:22. This verse teaches that when it comes to accursed people, accursed on account of their sin, justice demands that they be hung on a tree! And the only other time that this word for hanging on a tree occurs in the Old Testament is in our passage about Absalom's end.

From this we conclude that Absalom's death here is not incidental, but the Old Testament example of what every man deserves on account of our sin. THE overt picture of fallen man! And that is why we see so many similarities between ourselves and Absalom.

- Did he manipulate people to get his own way? So do we.
- Was he vengeful and spiteful? So are we.
- Did he strive to take the throne of his father? So do we.

Truly, every time we willingly participate in sin, we de-throne Christ and attempt to take a seat on His throne. You say, well then, where is Christ?

If it is true that everything written in the Old Testament bears witness to Christ²⁵ then where is Christ in this text? If Christ is not seen in Absalom, then where do we see Him?

We see Christ in DAVID and his seemingly misplaced mourning!

When we first considered the king's response to Absalom, we were disgusted at what we saw. It was pathetic. David was crying for an enemy while good men lost their lives while protecting yours. He was carrying on about Absalom such that the victory of David was like a defeat for his men. He allowed Israel to slink back into Jerusalem as if they'd done something wrong.

²⁵ Compare John 5:39-40

Yet this misplaced love and devotion when directed at us is an entirely different thing. In this light it is not pathetic rather it is most glorious. Do you see, David's mourning was not weakness but Christ-likeness!

And thus, do you understand that when God gazes upon you in your arrogant rebellion as you differ with His counsel and place yourself above His wise providence in your movements to take His throne that He does not condemn or call for your destruction.

Rather, like David, He looks to the one who would destroy you — Joab/Satan — and says concerning you

- That one will be kept alive!
- That one is mine!
- That one shall not perish!

And yet unlike David, He approached us as we hung on the tree, held there by our pride and arrogance, and right before Joab plunged three spears into our bodies, He interposed His Son who bore in His body three wounds on account of our sin which killed Him (two in his hands and one in his feet). God allowed His Son to die in our place! I love how John Hart put it- I've quoted it before:

Picture yourself tied to a tree,
Condemned for the sins of eternity.
Then picture a spear parting the air,
Seeking your heart to end your despair.

Suddenly- a Knight, in armor of white,
Stands in the gap betwixt you and its flight,
And shedding His 'armour of God' for you-
Bears the lance that runs Him through.

His heart has been pierced that yours may beat,
And the blood of His corpse washes your feet.

Picture yourself in raiment white,
Cleansed by the blood of the lifeless Knight.
Never to mourn the prince who was downed,
For He is not lost! It is you who are found.

Family of God as we gaze upon the Death of this Bad Man let us behold not simply the death of Absalom, but the wages of our sin had Christ not taken the three wounds intended for us. The heart of God who gazing upon our rebellion does not condemn, but forgive! "For by His wounds we are healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

And so let us rejoice exceedingly this day with a great joy.

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [The Death of a Bad Man](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 2, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church