

Absalom: Cursed and Killed

Call to Worship: Isaiah 53:10-12

Hymn #550- *Jesus, Priceless Treasure*

1st Scripture: Luke 23:26-49

Hymn Insert- *The Power of the Cross*

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 18:1-18

Hymn #186- *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*

Introduction:

By means of Hushai's counsel, the Lord had granted David precious time, enabling him to cross the Jordan, so that he could regroup, and better prepare for the upcoming battle against Absalom and his army. And so, after he crossed the Jordan, he ultimately made his way up to Mahanaim, where he was able to find refreshment and help, especially by three "God sends," Shobi, Machir and Barzillai.

We also saw, last time, that Absalom had eventually gathered the whole army of Israel together, which he had placed under the command and leadership of Amasa, his cousin, and David's nephew. And Absalom and this large army also cross the Jordan, and settle in the land of Gilead, as they seek to find and destroy David and his men.

Well, this morning, we move on, to where the action gets hot, as the great battle takes place between David's army and Absalom's army. And this will ultimately lead to the defeat of Israel, and the shameful, cursed death of David's son, Absalom.

I. Preparing for War (vs. 1-5)

Before we move into the actual battle that takes place, let us note a few significant facts about David's preparation for the battle, which further confirm the invaluable nature of Hushai's advice. And let us remember, that it was God, of course, who ultimately caused Ahithophel's counsel to be frustrated by Hushai, ultimately leading to the great advantages granted David, enabling him to access the time and resources, to properly prepare for the upcoming battle. Had Ahithophel's counsel been taken, David would have been buried under a tremendous disadvantage, which could very well have cost him the war, his kingdom, and of course, most of all, his life. [Read 2 Samuel 17:14]

How then does David prepare for the great battle?

1) He organizes a large army (much of which, probably came from the east side of the Jordan) into groups of hundreds with captains over each hundred. Then, he combines the groups of hundreds, into groups of thousands with senior captains over each thousand. And finally, he organizes the thousands into three larger groups, which are overseen by Joab, Abishai and Ittai the Gittite.

All of this to say that, David has a well organized army, which would have functioned like a well oiled machine. He would never have been able to do this (for one, he would not have had near as many soldiers), had he failed to make it over the Jordan River, and up to Mahanaim. And so, here is an additional way, in which, we can recognize the critical advantage, that Hushai's defeating of Ahithophel's counsel, had given David. This preparation was invaluable to David's success, even though, he was now facing a larger army. Experience, organization and wisdom were on his side, and these, mean much more than mere numbers. Of course, the greatest advantage of all, which even brought this about, was the fact that *God* was on his side!

2) At the behest of his men, David himself, does not go out to the battle. He winds up waiting at the gates of Mahanaim, avoiding any risk of him being killed in the war. Now, David had originally wanted to go out to the battle, probably because (a) he saw his sin as an indirect cause of the conflict, and (b) he wanted to attempt to bring his son, Absalom, back alive, which is confirmed in verse 5.

However, his people wisely refused to allow him to go. Like Absalom, he was the head of the snake, and if either head were cut off, the war would be over, and the other side would prevail. As long as David remained alive, even if his army suffered great losses, they would still have a chance of regaining the kingdom. However, if he was killed, then it would be a sure "Game Over!" [Read verses 2b-3]. David would be more helpful, remaining in the city, simply staying alive, and praying his army to victory.

Again, we recall that Ahithophel knew this all too well, which is why he advised Absalom, to let him go out immediately, with twelve thousand men, so that they could fall upon David, while he was weak and exposed, seeking to destroy him, while perhaps, salvaging the rest of his men. He knew that David was the "head of the snake," as it were. And so, again, we see

another critical advantage, obtained by Hushai, successfully defeating Ahithophel's counsel. [Read verse 4].

3) Finally, before sending his army out to the battle, David attempts to secure the safe retrieval of Absalom. [Read verse 5].

In the presence of everyone, David asks all of the captains, from the greatest to the least, to deal gently with Absalom, for David's sake. In other words, he desires that they would bring him back alive. Now, while the law of Moses, and the general welfare of the nation, should have demanded the opposite; Absalom, more than deserved to be executed, David probably had, at least, two main reasons for bringing forth this heartfelt request.

First, in spite of everything that had happened, Absalom was still his son. Without justifying David, it is natural to expect that a father would desire to keep his son alive, if possible; if for no other reason, than the hope that even within the confines of a prison, he could yet, possibly, repent and be spared from the far greater and eternal consequences of his sins. What Christian parent would not dread the unrelenting judgment of God upon their children, and the eternal consequences of the sins of their children, should they pass into the next life, unprepared? Absalom was on the verge of leaving this world, to stand before God, and David would give anything (even his own life), to grant him time, to repent of his wicked and heinous crimes. Would it be, brethren, that we would plead with God, to deal gently with our children, *not* for our sakes, but for Christ's sake; the only sake that offers substantial hope!

But second, David was certainly plagued by the fact that his sin, in a very real sense, was at the root of even Absalom's rebellion. The curse, proclaimed by Nathan, upon David, for his great sin with Bathsheba, no doubt, rang in his ears, constantly. And to that end, he found (without ignoring or eliminating the responsibility of Absalom), some significant level of personal responsibility, for all that was presently transpiring in his son's rebellion. If he could somehow spare his son, from the great effects of his own sin; at least, at the eternal level, he might be able to alleviate some of the guilt, which presently weighed him down. Again, let this be a stern reminder and caution to us, brethren, of how our sins can affect others; indeed, our own children! Was the short term, physical enjoyment of Bathsheba worth it?

Needless to say, David had hoped to preserve even a fraction of hope for his foolish son, Absalom.

And so, these are the ways, in which David prepares for the war.

II. The War (vs. 6-8)

In verse 6, we find that the battle took place in the woods of Ephraim. And that setting; a very difficult setting to fight in, also proved to be more advantageous for David's more experienced army, who better knew the land, and was better equipped to fight in the harsh terrain. We are told in verse 7, "The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David, and a great slaughter of *twenty thousand* took place there that day." Twenty thousand! Eight thousand more than what Ahithophel required, to deal with David on the other side of the Jordan, with the element of surprise, and the weariness (and weakness) of David and his men, on his side.

And verse 8 confirms how much "location," played a part in this slaughter: "For the battle there was scattered over the face of the whole countryside, and the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." On the other side of the Jordan, Absalom's army, though limited to twelve thousand, could very easily have fallen upon David, utilizing the Jordan River as a barrier. But here, the larger army was spread out thin, and the terrain; the thick woods and trees, caused more deaths than the sword did! Again, David's smaller, and yet, more skilled army had the great advantage here, and of course, no doubt, the hand of divine providence was greatly at work here. Needless to say, then, God granted David's armies a great victory here, more so, with the use of hard trees, than sharp swords.

III. Absalom's Downfall (vs. 9-18)

Finally, the entire second half of this section (vs. 9-18), explain the utter downfall and destruction of Absalom.

Indeed, the woods played a critical part in his downfall, as well. We are told that Absalom had met the servants of David, and apparently, as he went to speed away on his mule, he rode underneath the thick boughs of a terebinth tree, and his long hair (the very symbol of his

gross vanity), got caught in the branches, and his head became lodged in the boughs. And naturally, when he lifted his hands up to free himself, the mule kept moving forward, and he was stuck, hanging "between heaven and earth," as the text states (vs. 9). And although he was still alive, he was unable to free himself. He just hung there.

And so, one of the soldiers sees Absalom hanging there, and he quickly reports the news to Joab. Joab then rebukes the soldier, saying, in essence, "Why didn't you kill him! Had you done so, I would have greatly rewarded you, both monetarily and in rank!" But the soldier, recalling David's instructions, tells Joab, that he would not have touched Absalom for any amount of money, whatsoever. He rightly refused to disobey the king's orders, and furthermore, he knew that had he harmed Absalom, David would have found out, and Joab himself would have turned on him, at that point.

Frustrated with the soldier, Joab himself goes to where Absalom is hanging, not surprisingly, with the intention of dealing with Absalom himself, contrary to the orders of the king. And so, he finds Absalom hanging from the tree, and we are told that, he lunges three spears into Absalom's chest. And then, whatever strand of life remained in Absalom, was flushed out by Joab's young armor bearers, who surrounded Absalom and finished the job.

Following this, rather than continue to pursue and slaughter the remaining, living Israelites, Joab commendably blows the trumpet, and calls off the pursuit. At this point, the head of the snake was cut off, and there was no need to destroy anymore of the people of Israel. The war was over.

Absalom's limp, hanging body is removed from the tree, and cast into a pit in the woods, like a worthless piece of meat. He doesn't receive a proper burial, fitting of a peasant, let alone of a prince. Instead, he is given the burial of an outcast, cursed, rebel. Everyone throws large stones on his body, looking upon his life and death, with eyes of shame, until a large memorial heap of stones rises out of the pit, and the words, "Here lies the rebel," implicitly speak to every passerby, from that day onward!

Finally, in verse 18, we are told of a monument, which Absalom himself, had set up for himself, in the King's Valley, as a means of memorializing his name, since he no longer had any sons. Apparently, the three that were born to him (2 Sam. 14:27) had died, for reasons, of which

we are not told. Needless to say, we are given the detailed information that we are given, so that we might recognize; so that our own hearts might sink with sorrow, at least for a time, as we visualize the utter downfall, shame and destruction of a powerful and proud, young man.

IV. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Brethren, what applications can we then take, from the sorrowful and tragic revelations, given us, by God, in this text?

1) Recognize again, the wicked and insubordinate heart of Joab, who had disregarded the king's orders. Did Absalom deserve to die? Absolutely! From the standpoint of divine justice and providence, did God have Absalom executed, there in the woods of Ephraim? Certainly! But, from the standpoint of Joab, he should have brought Absalom back to the king, alive. There, he could have attempted to deal with Absalom, by just and righteous means.

At best, we might believe that Joab had the best interests of the kingdom in mind. Indeed, Absalom was a danger to the people of God. All that he had done, more than warranted his execution. But again, the king gave his orders, and Absalom was defenseless when he was found, easily able to be apprehended and brought to justice. And should David wrongly lay justice aside, again, vengeance yet, belonged to the Lord.

More than likely, Joab was also offended because of the fact that he was the one, who had brought Absalom back to Jerusalem, attempting to reconcile him to his father. In this sense, Absalom's rebellion was a strong slap in the face of Joab, as well. Judging by Joab's character, this weighed into the equation, of why he killed Absalom. Whatever the case, he ought to have followed the king's command. Even the soldier, who had reported seeing Absalom, to Joab, knew this. His fear of, and respect for the king, should have cautioned Joab. But, Joab has already proven himself insubordinate in the past, and he will do so again, in the upcoming passages of Scripture.

Brethren, let us take the caution here, to be careful to respect those authorities, which God places over us, in this world. Those, who are quick to disregard authority, not only break the Fifth Commandment, but they find themselves growing further hardened in this regard, and in due time, God will put them in their place. [Remember David's great respect, even for Saul]

2) Young people, and those of you, who are outside of Jesus Christ; to the unsaved, non-Christian, see again, the end of Absalom here. Why are we given this vivid picture of the utter destruction of a young man? What is God saying to us, with this gross account of Absalom's death? O Recall the vain and empty pursuit of this world's interests! Look upon the well respected, handsome looking, wealthy prince, Absalom! Look upon one, who had everything, and only coveted more! Look upon the many opportunities to repent and seek the Lord, which he was given! And see his end! See the end of the wicked! See *your* end, if you die outside of Jesus Christ!

Absalom rebelled against the king; albeit, an imperfect king, but God's anointed, nonetheless! And you, you rebel against the perfect, all glorious, King Jesus, the Son of God, every moment that you fail to bow the knee to Him! See your end! All of the glory and pomp of this life...what will it bring you in the end? See the cursed, attractive, popular, and yet, rebellious Absalom, hanging helplessly from the tree! What good did his looks do for him then? What good did his rising popularity do for him then? What good did his power and pomp and show, do for him then! So beautiful and admired by the world around him, and yet, unfit to stand upon the earth or to rise in heaven, from the standpoint of God, whose standpoint alone matters!

See him there, with three spears stuck in his chest; with mocking, laughing young men, surrounding him, cutting him, striking him, and stealing away his last breaths! And what monument is he most remembered by? The one, which he set up for himself, saying, "Here, once stood a man, whose three sons have died; whose legacy does not exist, because he was cursed?" Or, the large pile of stones, rising out of a pit, underneath which, his lifeless, limp body rested, like a broken, battered and abused piece of meat! Such is the end of all, who die outside of Jesus Christ; unrepentant, without a living faith in the living Christ!

3) And you might ask, "If that is the deserving judgment to come upon unrepentant sinners, than what of the many sins committed by all Christians, with whom you are calling me to identify?" Well friends, that curse, which is presently yours, was rightly ours, as well! But, here's the difference! One stood in *our* place! One bore *our* curse for us!

It was the Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered the shame, due all His people! No Christian ever claims to deserve anything less than Absalom's end! But Christ never deserved it, although

he embraced it, for us! He hung on that tree...standing between heaven and earth, an abused, bloodied, broken, piece of flesh! A worm, and no man; mocked by all who surrounded Him! Indeed, He is a most glorious King, but he would have been without subjects, had He not bore their shame first, in their stead! And so, we see Him there, unrecognizable, flesh torn away from his body by fierce whipping, a crown of thorns pressed down upon his head, pierced limbs, bones out of joint, naked, shamed, before a watching world, with the words, "He saved others, let Him save Himself," and "Let us see if God truly delights in Him," invading His ears and thoughts! And then, the greatest stroke of justice came; that which could not be detected in Absalom, that which, could not be comprehended on this side of the grave...the wrath of Almighty God, fell upon Him. The best we could grasp is the darkened heavens, at high noon, and the squeezing out, what we could not grasp, which was happening on the inside, when our Lord screamed, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!" Justice on the soul, complimenting the justice on His body...but who could comprehend it! Only those in hell!

What do a hanging Ahithophel, a hanging Absalom, a hanging Judas Iscariot, and a hanging Jesus Christ, have in common? All of them were cursed! But the last of these, was cursed for no sin of His own! And so, friends, with whom do you identify? Will you die, an unredeemed son of Adam, cursed, and bearing the judgment of God on your soul, for your own sin? Or, will you die a son of God, in union with Christ in *His death and in His life*, being freed from the penalty and guilt of your sins, because He bore them for you! The message is clear, friends! God wastes no space in His divine revelation! He satisfies no curiosities! What He gives us, is given for a reason! Take it, and benefit from it... unto the saving of your never dying soul!

AMEN!!!

The Lord's Supper!