

“Treason!”
2 Samuel 15:1-14
(Preached at Trinity, September 15, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. David is about to reap the whirlwind of his lack of prudence regarding his children. David loved them to a fault. He allowed his love for Absalom to cloud his judgment. Richard Phillips writes, “Sentimentalism and parental neglect seems to have led him to reject all prudence in governing his now-oldest son, Absalom. Unfortunately for David, Absalom was ‘a truly despicable human being. He thought of no one but himself. He was proud and arrogant. He was deceptive and dishonourable. He was a cold-blooded killer.’ In Absalom, David had set his love on a son who was unworthy of it.”¹
2. Absalom's qualifications for office are summarized in **2 Samuel 14:25-26**.
He was extremely handsome
He had a full head of hair
He had a fine family—three sons and a beautiful daughter
He was perfect in every way, at least outwardly. He's the kind of man Israel desired in their king. We are supposed to see the great contrast between the outward beauty and the inward defilement.
1 Samuel 16:7 NAU - "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."
 - a. It sounds remarkably like modern politics where superficial elements like good looks and smooth talking supplant any true qualities for office, like wisdom and piety. Absalom's qualities were exactly like those of Israel's first king.
1 Samuel 9:2 NAU - "He had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome *man*, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people."
1 Samuel 10:23-24 NAU - "So they ran and took him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. ²⁴ Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people." So all the people shouted and said, "*Long* live the king!"
 - b. Some blame our modern situation on the advent of television. Before the arrival of the television screen outward appearance was not put on display. The grainy likeness in the newspaper was the only image most had of their leaders. The presidential race of 1960 changed everything as the young, handsome, charismatic John Kennedy outshined the less impressive Richard Nixon.

¹ Phillips, Richard. *2 Samuel, Reformed Expository Commentary*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2018, Pages 280-281.

[Wikipedia](#) describes the first televised debate: “Nixon's poor appearance on television in the first debate is reflected by the fact that his mother called him immediately following the debate to ask if he was sick. Kennedy, by contrast, rested and prepared extensively beforehand, appearing tanned, confident, and relaxed during the debate.”

As Dale Ralph Davis writes: “Our times insist on style over substance, cosmetics over content, manner over matter.”²

- c. Such superficiality has sadly found its way into the church. The desired pastors in the contemporary church are described as, “Winsome, charismatic, executive like pastors who exude warmth and success. Known more for their humor than for their spirituality, today’s market-sensitive pastors are relationally savvy.... Instead of eliciting deep feelings of guilt as the old revivalists did, these pastors lift the spirit, promote optimism and make people feel good about themselves.”³
- d. As we can read in our text, the phenomena existed long before television. In fact, superficial appearance has forever attracted the attention of superficial people. Spiritual substance must shine over superficial appearance. They said of the Apostle Paul that his appearance was nothing remarkable, but never was there a theologian to compare.

2 Corinthians 10:10 NAU - "For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."

- 3. Absalom was just the man Israel would be attracted to and now, being brought back into the favor of David, Absalom wasted no time putting his grand scheme into play. As I stated earlier, “he was a truly a despicable human being.” He was narcissistic and completely void of integrity. He committed treason of the worst sort. I want to point out his treason and then consider the ultimate source.

- I. First, Absalom committed treason of the traditional sort – treason against the government of his nation

- A. God establishes government

Romans 13:1-2 NAU - "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

- 1. Civil government is ordained of God to maintain social order
- 2. It is important for the citizens to submit to the authority of their government
- 3. There may come a time when a people, united declare independence from the governing power. This was true when the US declared independence from England. There were those on both sides of the argument but Godly men determined that there can come a time when a leader can be corrupt and abandon the laws of the land.

² Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary, (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 184.

³ Ibid, 184–185.

- a. Scottish theologian Samuel Rutherford penned the important theological work *Lex Rex*, demonstrating that the law is king rather than vice versa.
 - b. The colonists in Declaration of Independence expressed this position
 “When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”
4. But the general rule for us all is loyalty and submission to our civil authority. Whether or not you embrace the legitimacy of throwing off tyranny, Absalom was not rebelling against a tyrannical power. He was rebelling against the reign of David, who although he was but a sinful man, he could hardly be called a tyrant.
- B. Absalom was not liberating the nation from tyranny. His motive was only in exalting himself.
- 1. Absalom became his own authority. He purposed in his heart to wrench the throne away from the governing power.
 - 2. In claiming his own right to the throne he was actually rising up against his own nation?
 - 3. Absalom’s actions would become the pattern for many of Israel’s future kings. Many future kings would come to power through the assignation of the seated king.
- C. Absalom had no regard for the laws of the land, the laws of decent society, the laws that make it possible for people to dwell together with a sense of order and decorum. Absalom was a law unto himself. If he didn’t get his way he would set the world ablaze.
- II. Second, Absalom’s rebellion was against the laws of home.
- A. We must not overlook that Israel’s king was Absalom’s father.
- 1. We don’t know how early this began but Absalom had no respect for parental authority or regard for the honor due his father.
 - 2. William Blackburn wrote: “Many a traitor and conspirator was in childhood a little rebel, opposing, with all his might, the parental authority and rules. The mother of Benedict Arnold was a woman of exemplary piety, and the parental government was the kindest . . . but he was perverse from the beginning. He loved the malicious sort of mischief. Applause delighted him, and if he could not win praise by daring deeds, he made himself notorious by boyish lawlessness. As a man, treason has made him infamous.”⁴
 - 3. He was eager to take not only the crown of his father, but also his head.

⁴ William M. Blackburn, *The Rebel Prince*, (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, facsimile from the 1864 edition), Page 111.

- B. Absalom had a duty to honor his father
1. It takes the worst sort of a human being to turn against his parents
 2. In the old covenant it was punishable by death
Exodus 21:15 NAU - "He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."
- III. Most important, Absalom's treason was against God
- A. Ultimately, David's throne was established by God
1. Absalom was attacking God's anointed
 2. Years before David set the pattern that should guide the heart of all of us as we consider the leaders God has placed over us.
1 Samuel 26:11 NAU - "The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed"
 3. When David fled from Absalom and left Jerusalem not a single Levite remained – **Verse 24**
This means no Temple worship. They were declaring Absalom's rule to be illegitimate. Absalom was rebelling against the throne of God.
- B. Absalom thought little of standing against God's dominion
1. Absalom stood in accord with the endless rebels who have sought to stand against God's dominion
Psalms 2:2-3 NAU - "The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"
 2. Absalom dismissed God's law
 3. He committed murder and robbery. He had a lying tongue. He despised his parents.
- C. When we dismiss God's law it is akin to treason
1. We declare our dominion and deny God His right to rule.
 2. God's law is clear, "Thou shalt have no other God's before me."
- IV. Absalom's methods mirrored the work of Satan – the great deceiver
- A. Absalom would have considered his actions wise and prudent
1. Seldom do men of wickedness claim the wretchedness of their acts. The great tragedy is those under Satan's deceptions are completely unaware of Satan's actions. That's why they are called deceptions.
 2. Absalom sincerely believed he deserved the throne. He believed he was worthy of the praise of Israel. He felt fully justified in his actions – but he was Satan's pawn.
 3. How often are we used as Satan's pawns? When Paul instructed the church of Corinth to restore the offending brother he cautioned them:
2 Corinthians 2:11 NAU - "so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."
- B. Absalom began by acts of deception, stealing away the hearts of the people
1. Absalom was ambitious and smooth talking
 2. In order to be successful in his plan Absalom had to win the confidence of the people. This was confidence justly earned and rightfully owned by David.

3. Where David was unassuming, Absalom surrounded himself with pomp and revelry. He had to appear “kingly.” Pride is a sure sign of Satan’s influence.

2 Samuel 15:1 NAU - "Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men as runners before him."

- a. In order for his scheme to be successful he had to get the people to start talking. He had to be the object of their attention. Since people are easily attracted to displays of pomp, Absalom’s task was easy to accomplish.
- b. He was good-looking and winsome. They talked of his appearance, his chariot, his bodyguards.
This is possibly the first time a chariot had been seen in the streets of Jerusalem.
- c. The nature of Christ’s kingdom is that of childlike faith that’s void of the pursuit of human greatness, power and fame.

- C. Absalom continued his deception by pretending to be a just and righteous judge

1. He sat in the gate, ready to hear their cases.
Absalom knew well the art of politics by promise—making promises that he had no interest in keeping. He only had to give the appearance of keeping them.

2. As the king, David could not personally hear every judicial case. He was overburdened and there were inevitable delays. Moses faced the same situation and hearing the counsel of his father-in-law, he established a system of judicial oversight.

Exodus. 18:21-22 NAU - "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²² "Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you."

3. Rather than offering to help his father, Absalom set himself up as judge and ruled favorably to everyone seeking his opinion. He offered the promise that if he were king life would be better. Sound familiar?
His methods were full of deceit and selfish gain.
4. This is the way Satan functions
 - a. He comes with smooth words and deceitful promises
 - b. He is the most proud being ever created and all that surrounds him is pride. Pride is a certain manifestation of his work. This is clearly seen in Absalom.
5. Paul contended with smooth talking false apostles in his day, seeking to undermine his ministry. He described the ultimate source of their actions.
2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NAU - "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

6. We would be wise to guard against the smooth talker. Trust is good, but blind trust can fail to recognize the backstabber. David's love and trust of Absalom blinded him of the danger.
- D. Once Absalom gained the favor of the people he turned against David and secretly made himself king
1. Absalom had been patient, craftily putting his plan into play.
Verse 7 tells us it took four years (probably not forty).
 2. Securing permission to go to Hebron Absalom put his plan into action
2 Samuel 15:10 NAU - "But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'""
 3. He entrapped 200 who innocently followed Absalom to Hebron only to be implicated in the treason – **Verse 11**.
 4. David loved and trusted Absalom. Too late did he discover the treason. He had no choice but to flee
2 Samuel 15:13-14 NAU - "Then a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." ¹⁴ David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise and let us flee, for *otherwise* none of us will escape from Absalom."
 5. What father would suspect that his own son would seek his life?
2 Samuel 15:14 NAU - "Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."

Conclusion:

1. The truest application we can glean from this is the wickedness of the human heart and the subtlety of Satan's devices. Working together, it produces the most vile and wretched deeds one can imagine. And yet, such deeds fill the history of man. Each of us share the guilt.
2. Absalom committed treason against his country, against his father, and ultimately against God. And he would have felt perfectly justified. May God protect us from such delusions as we make our daily decisions.