



Absalom's Rebellion

Kicking It Off:

Who is someone you admire for their humility? What qualities do they exhibit that you find admirable?

Read:

2 Samuel 15:1-12

Summary

The story of Absalom and King David offers profound insights into the nature of rebellion, the importance of humility, and the necessity of trusting in God's plan. At its core, rebellion often begins with the deceptively simple thought, "I know better." This attitude, rooted in pride and self-importance, can lead to questioning authority, taking unilateral action, and rallying others against established leadership.

Contrasting this rebellious spirit is the path of humility, which involves submitting to authority even in difficult circumstances. This submission isn't passive acceptance, but an active choice requiring faith and patience. It demonstrates trust in God's sovereignty, acknowledging that He works through imperfect human systems and leaders.

Ultimately, the call is to trust in God's plan for our lives. His perspective is eternal, and His plans are for our welfare, even when we don't understand them. This trust requires viewing life from an eternal standpoint rather than focusing solely on temporary desires or immediate justice.

During our discussion we can focus on:

- Recognizing and resisting the subtle beginnings of rebellion in our hearts
- Choosing humility and submission, especially when it's challenging

- Trusting God's timing and plan, even when it differs from our preferences
- Understanding submission to God as an act of faith
- Adopting an eternal perspective on life's circumstances
- Embracing the daily choice to surrender to God's will

This is a continual process of aligning our hearts with God's will, choosing daily to forgive and submit to His plan. It's a challenging path, but one that leads to true fulfillment and alignment with God's purposes.

Discussion Questions

1. Rebellion often begins with the thought "I know better." This attitude can be subtle and may even seem justified when we perceive injustice or inefficiency around us. **Can you recall a time when you felt you knew better than those in authority over you? How did you handle that situation, and what was the outcome?**
2. The path of humility often requires submitting to imperfect authorities. This can be challenging, especially when we disagree with their decisions or methods. **How do you balance respecting authority with addressing genuine concerns or injustices? Can you share an experience where you had to navigate this balance?**
3. Trusting in God's plan often means accepting His timeline, which may be different from our own. This can be particularly difficult when we're facing challenging circumstances or waiting for a long-desired outcome. **Describe a situation where you had to wait on God's timing. How did this experience affect your faith and your understanding of trust?**
4. The story of David grieving over Absalom despite his rebellion illustrates God's heart towards us. Even in our rebellious moments, God desires reconciliation rather than destruction. **How does this perspective of God's fatherly love impact your view of your own shortcomings or rebellious tendencies? How might it change the way you approach others who are rebellious or difficult?**
5. Living out the principles of humility and trust is a daily choice. Each day presents new opportunities to either surrender to God's plan or

continue in our own way. **What practical steps can you take to cultivate a spirit of humility and trust in your daily life? Are there specific areas where you find this particularly challenging?**

Sermon Notes

2 Samuel 15:1-12

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. ²And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," ³Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." ⁴Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." ⁵And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

⁷And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. ⁸For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.'" ⁹The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. ¹⁰But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'" ¹¹With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. ¹²And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.

Outline

1. The Heart of Rebellion
 - a. Understanding Absalom's perspective
 - i. Witnessing David's sin with Bathsheba and its consequences
 - ii. Seeing injustice in David's household (Amnon and Tamar incident)
 - b. The nature of rebellion
 - i. Begins with thinking "I know better"
 - ii. Rooted in pride and self-importance
 - iii. Often starts with good intentions (seeking justice)
 - c. The progression of rebellion
 - i. Questioning authority
 - ii. Taking matters into one's own hands
 - iii. Garnering support and "stealing hearts" (Absalom's strategy)
 - d. The American perspective on rebellion
 - i. Difficulty in seeing rebellion as inherently sinful
 - ii. The Revolutionary War example and its complexities
2. The Path of Humility
 - a. David's example of humility
 - i. Refusing to harm Saul despite opportunities
 - ii. Recognizing God's sovereignty in appointing leaders
 - b. Biblical teachings on humility
 - i. 1 Peter 5:5-7 - Submit to elders, clothe yourselves with humility
 - ii. Psalm 37:7 - Be still before the Lord and wait patiently
 - c. The challenge of submission
 - i. Submitting to imperfect authorities
 - ii. Trusting God's plan even in difficult circumstances
 - d. The paradox of submission
 - i. Submission as an act of faith
 - ii. Trusting God's timing and plan over our own
3. The Call to Trust
 - a. God's perspective on our lives
 - i. Jeremiah 29:11 - God's plans for welfare, not for evil
 - ii. The importance of patience in God's timing
 - b. The heart of the Gospel
 - i. Recognizing the futility of our own plans
 - ii. Embracing God's eternal plan over our temporary desires
 - c. The father's heart of God
 - i. David's grief over Absalom's death

- ii. God's desire for reconciliation, not destruction
- d. The daily choice
 - i. Surrendering to God's plan vs. continuing in rebellion
 - ii. Living out the Gospel, not just hearing it

Notes

As I've been contemplating the story of Absalom and his relationship with King David, I've come to some profound realizations about the nature of rebellion, the importance of humility, and the necessity of trusting in God's plan. These reflections have challenged me to examine my own heart and actions in a new light.

I've come to understand that rebellion often begins with the seemingly innocent thought, "I know better." It's a sentiment I've felt many times, especially when faced with authority figures or situations that don't align with my sense of justice or efficiency. The story of Absalom resonates with me because I can see how his rebellion, which ultimately led to tragedy, began with what appeared to be good intentions. Absalom witnessed injustice within his father's household and felt compelled to act. How often have I felt the same way? When I see problems in my workplace, my community, or even in my church, my first instinct is often to take matters into my own hands. I convince myself that I have the solution, that my way is better, faster, more just.

But this is where the danger lies. This sense of "knowing better" is rooted in pride and self-importance. It's a subtle shift from seeking justice to seeking control, from wanting to solve problems to wanting to be seen as the problem-solver. I've realized that this is the seedbed of rebellion – not just against human authority, but ultimately against God's authority. The progression of rebellion is insidious. It starts with questioning, moves to action, and often ends with garnering support for one's cause. I can see how Absalom "stole the hearts" of the people, positioning himself as the solution to their problems. How often have I done the same, albeit on a smaller scale? Complaining about leadership to coworkers, undermining decisions I disagree with, or simply harboring resentment in my heart – these are all forms of rebellion that I've been guilty of. As an American, I've struggled with the idea that rebellion is inherently sinful. Our national mythology celebrates rebellion against unjust authority. But I'm beginning to see that this perspective is overly simplistic. Even in cases where rebellion might seem justified, there's a complexity to it that we often overlook. Our motivations are rarely pure, and the consequences of our actions are often far-reaching and unpredictable.

Contrasting Absalom's rebellion with David's earlier actions has been eye-opening for me. Despite having opportunities to harm Saul, who was actively trying to kill him, David chose the path of humility and submission. This challenges me deeply. How often have I justified my rebellious attitudes or actions because I felt wronged or threatened? David's example shows a profound understanding of God's sovereignty. He recognized that God was the one who appointed leaders, even flawed ones like Saul. This perspective requires a level of trust and humility that I often struggle to achieve. It's easy for me to submit to authorities I respect or agree with, but what about those I don't? What about situations where I genuinely believe I know better? The biblical teachings on humility have taken on new meaning for me in light of these reflections. The call to "clothe yourselves with humility" and to "be still before the Lord and wait patiently" challenges my natural inclinations. I want to act, to fix, to control. But I'm learning that true humility often requires patience and trust in God's timing and plan. This path of humility is not an easy one. It requires submitting to imperfect authorities and trusting God's plan even in difficult circumstances. I've struggled with this, especially when I see injustice or inefficiency. But I'm beginning to understand that submission isn't about believing the authority is always right – it's about trusting that God is sovereign even over flawed human systems and leaders. There's a beautiful paradox in this kind of submission. By choosing to submit to God's authority and timing, I'm actually exercising a profound kind of faith. It's easy to trust God when everything aligns with my preferences and timeline. But to trust Him when things don't make sense, when I feel I could do better – that's the real test of faith.

As I've wrestled with these concepts, I've come to a deeper appreciation of God's perspective on our lives. The promise in Jeremiah that God's plans for us are for welfare and not for evil has taken on new significance. I'm realizing that my timeline and God's timeline often don't align, and that's okay. His plans often take longer to unfold than I'd like, but they're always better than what I could devise on my own. This realization has brought me to the heart of the Gospel in a fresh way. I'm seeing more clearly the futility of my own plans and the eternal nature of God's plan. It's humbling to admit, but so much of what I strive for is temporary. I get caught up in my own desires, my own sense of what's right and just, and I forget to view things from an eternal perspective. The image of God as a loving father has been particularly impactful. Just as David grieved over Absalom despite his rebellion, God's heart towards us is one of reconciliation, not destruction. This challenges me to view my own rebellious tendencies differently. God isn't waiting to punish me for stepping out of line; He's eagerly waiting for me to turn back to Him, to align myself with His will. I'm realizing that this is a daily choice. Each day, I have the opportunity to surrender to God's plan or to continue in my own rebellion. It's not a one-time decision, but a continual process of laying down my pride, my plans, and my desire for control. Living out these truths is far

harder than simply hearing them. It requires a constant reorientation of my heart and mind. When I'm passed over for a promotion, when I disagree with a decision at church, when I feel misunderstood or mistreated – these are all opportunities to choose humility and trust over rebellion. As I reflect on my own role as a parent, I'm gaining new insight into God's fatherly love for us. I want the best for my children, but I also know that they need to develop character, not just have all their desires fulfilled. In the same way, I'm learning to trust that God's plans for me, even when they involve difficulties or delays, are ultimately for my good and for the development of my character.

In conclusion, these reflections have deeply challenged my understanding of rebellion, humility, and trust. I'm seeing how often my heart aligns more with Absalom than with David, and I'm convicted of my need to cultivate a spirit of humility and submission. At the same time, I'm encouraged by the persistent love of God, who continues to call us back to Himself even in our rebellion. Moving forward, my prayer is that I would have the courage to choose daily forgiveness and submission to God's plan. I want to resist the temptation to "know better" and instead trust in the wisdom and timing of God. It's a journey, and I know I'll stumble along the way, but I'm grateful for a God who is patient with us as we learn to align our hearts with His.

Blog

At its heart, the story of David and Absalom presents a contrast: Absalom, a charismatic figure who positions himself as a "man for the people," and David, long celebrated as a "man after God's own heart." The story of Absalom's rebellion unfolds against the backdrop of David's reign, a period marked by both triumph and tragedy. David had led Israel to great heights, expanding its territories and establishing it as a regional power. Yet, his rule was not without its dark chapters, most notably his affair with Bathsheba and the subsequent orchestration of her husband Uriah's death. These events cast a long shadow over David's reign and set the stage for the turbulent years that would follow.

It is in this context that we encounter Absalom, David's third son and a man of significant presence. The biblical text describes him in positive terms, noting that "in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom" (2 Samuel 14:25). Beyond his physical appeal, Absalom possessed a keen political insight that would prove both his greatest asset and his ultimate undoing.

The story of Absalom's rebellion, as detailed in 2 Samuel 15:1-12, provides a lesson in political maneuvering. We see Absalom strategically positioning himself at the city gate, the center of public life and judicial proceedings in

ancient cities. Here, he intercepts those coming to seek the king's judgment, offering a sympathetic ear and suggesting that their cases would be better served if he were judge. "Oh that I were judge in the land!" Absalom told them, "Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice" (2 Samuel 15:4). This calculated move reveals much about Absalom's character and his understanding of political power. Unlike his father, who ascended to the throne through the Lord, Absalom seeks to build his base from the ground up. He recognizes that true power in a monarchy doesn't solely rest on God's plan, but also on the support and loyalty of the people. In this sense, Absalom emerges as a strikingly modern figure, one who understands the importance of public opinion and the power of populist appeal.

Absalom's approach stands in stark contrast to that of his father. While David is often portrayed as a man of deep faith, one who seeks God's guidance in all matters of life, Absalom appears more concerned with earthly matters. He focuses on the immediate needs and complaints of the people, positioning himself as a champion of the common man. This strategy proves remarkably effective, with the biblical text noting that Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:6).

But what drives Absalom to such lengths? To understand his motivations, we must understand his perspective and the events that shaped his life. Absalom was born into royalty, the son of a king who had risen from humble origins to become the most powerful man in Israel. From his earliest years, Absalom would have been aware of the privileges and responsibilities that came with his position. Yet, he would also have witnessed the darker side of power, including the personal failings of his father and the consequences these had on the family.

One pivotal event that likely influenced Absalom's trajectory was the rape of his sister Tamar by their half-brother Amnon. When David failed to adequately address this grievous act, it was Absalom who took matters into his own hands, arranging for Amnon's murder. This incident reveals several key aspects of Absalom's character: his strong sense of family loyalty, his willingness to act decisively (and violently) when he feels justice has not been served, and perhaps most importantly, his disillusionment with his father's leadership.

From Absalom's perspective, David's failure to punish Amnon might have represented a broader failure of leadership. If the king could not ensure justice within his own household, how could he be trusted to administer justice for the entire nation? This event may have planted the seeds of Absalom's ambition, convincing him that he could be a more effective ruler than his father. Also, Absalom's actions at the city gate suggest a genuine concern for the welfare of the people. While his motives were undoubtedly self-serving, we should not dismiss the possibility that Absalom truly believed he could provide better leadership for Israel. His promise to "give justice" to

every man who came to him indicates a desire to create a more responsive and accessible system of governance.

But, for all his political savvy and popular appeal, Absalom's rebellion ultimately failed. This failure prompts us to consider the limitations of his approach and the enduring strength of David's leadership. While Absalom may have won the hearts of many Israelites, David never lost the favor of God.

This brings us to the central contrast between Absalom and David: the source of their authority and the nature of their leadership. David, described as a "man after God's own heart," grounded his rule in his relationship with the Lord. His psalms reveal a man who, despite his flaws, continually sought God's guidance and forgiveness. This spiritual foundation provided David with a resilience that allowed him to weather numerous crises, including Absalom's rebellion.

Absalom, on the other hand, sought to build his power base purely through human means. His charisma, political intelligence, and promises of better governance were powerful tools, but they lacked God's blessing which legitimized David's rule in the eyes of many Israelites. In this sense, Absalom's story serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of relying solely on popular support and personal ambition.

The tragic end of Absalom's rebellion – his defeat and death at the hands of David's forces – raises profound questions about the nature of leadership and the complex relationship between God's favor and popular support. Absalom's story challenges us to reflect on our own motivations and methods in pursuing our goals. Absalom's rebellion highlights important issues about governance and leadership that remain relevant today. His success in winning popular support by promising more accessible and responsive leadership touches on a perennial concern in political systems. The story also invites us to consider the role of charisma and popular appeal in leadership. Absalom's physical beauty and charm are emphasized in the biblical text, suggesting that these qualities played a significant role in his ability to "steal the hearts" of the Israelites.

- The text presents Absalom as a "man for the people" in contrast to David being a "man after God's own heart." How do you think this distinction plays out in modern leadership? Can a leader effectively balance popular appeal with adherence to higher principles or divine guidance? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of each approach?
- Absalom's rebellion was partly fueled by his disillusionment with David's leadership, especially after the incident with Tamar and Amnon. How does this highlight the importance of justice and accountability in leadership? In what ways might personal or familial failures of a leader impact their public role and the stability of their governance?