



36: If Only I Had Died Instead of You (2 Samuel 16:15-18:33)

David's son betrayed him, stole his throne, and sought his life—yet David still cried, "If only I had died instead of you." Today we see how this powerful moment points to Jesus Christ, who didn't merely wish to die for rebels—He actually did.

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* All Scripture is from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise noted.

2 Samuel 16:15-22

Now **Absalom** and all the Israelites **came to Jerusalem**. **Ahithophel** was also with him. When David's friend Hushai the Archite came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" "Is this your loyalty to your friend?" Absalom asked Hushai. "Why didn't you go with your friend?" "Not at all," Hushai answered Absalom. "I am on the side of the one that the Lord, this people, and all the men of Israel have chosen. I will stay with him." Furthermore, whom will I serve if not his son? As I served in your father's presence, I will also serve in yours."

Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give me your advice. What should we do?" **Ahithophel** replied to Absalom, "**Sleep with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace.** When all Israel hears that you have become repulsive to your father, everyone with you will be encouraged." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he slept with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

How wicked, yet how predicted! Nathan the prophet had told this to David well before it ever happened.

2 Samuel 12:9-12 Why then have **you despised the LORD's command by doing** what I consider **evil**? You struck down Uriah the Hethite with the sword and took his wife as your own wife—you murdered him with the Ammonite's sword. Now therefore, **the sword will never leave your house** because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hethite to be your own wife.' This is what the LORD says, **I am going to bring disaster on you from your own family:** I will take your wives and give them to another before your very eyes, and he will sleep with them in broad daylight. You acted in secret, but **I will do this** before all Israel and in broad daylight.' "

Sexual activity with a king's wife or concubine was an ancient Near East custom in other nations, claiming the king's throne and family. *Now there is NO GOING BACK.* Absalom has taken David's people, David's advisor, David's throne, and David's women. And now, he is ready to take *David's life*.

2 Samuel 16:23-17:4

Now the advice Ahithophel gave in those days was like someone asking about a word from God—such was the regard that both David and Absalom had for Ahithophel's advice. Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose **twelve thousand men, and I will set out in pursuit of David tonight.** I will attack him while he is weary and discouraged, throw him into a panic, and all the people with him will scatter. **I will strike down only the king** and bring all the people back to you. When everyone returns except the man you're looking for, all the people will be at peace." This proposal seemed right to Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

Now this betrayal is getting REAL! Absalom affirms the plan to have his own father killed under the advice and lead of David's former senior advisor - Ahithophel.

Ahithophel has given solid military advice: 1) Overwhelming force 12,000 against likely less than 2,000
2) the element of surprise attack at night 3) *focused on one target - David.*

2 Samuel 17:5-6 Then Absalom said, "Summon Hushai the Archite also. Let's hear what he has to say as well." So Hushai came to Absalom, and Absalom told him, "Ahithophel offered this proposal. Should we carry out his proposal? If not, what do you say?" Hushai replied to Absalom, "The advice Ahithophel has given this time is not good." Hushai continued, "You know **your father and his men. They are warriors** and are desperate like a wild bear robbed of her cubs. **Your father is an experienced soldier who won't spend the night with the people.** He's probably already hiding in one of the caves or some other place. If some of our troops fall first, someone is sure to hear and say, 'There's been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.' Then, even a brave man with the heart of a lion will lose heart because all Israel knows that **your father and the valiant men with him are warriors.**

2 Samuel 17:11-13

Instead, **I advise** that all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba—as numerous as the sand by the sea—be gathered to you and **that you personally go into battle**. Then we will attack David wherever we find him, and we will descend on him like dew on the ground. Not even one will be left—neither he nor any of the men with him. If he retreats to some city, all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag its stones into the valley until not even a pebble can be found there.”

This advice will take a lot more time, to rally these troops from all over Israel. Yes, there will be more troops, BUT - as Hushai knows - this will also allow David to grow his forces and have the advantage of where the battle will take place.

2 Samuel 17:14

Since **the LORD had decreed that Ahithophel's good advice be undermined** in order to bring about Absalom's ruin, Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than Ahithophel's advice.”

So, God has listened to David's simple prayer and used David's friend to give David what he had asked.

2 Samuel 15:31 Then someone reported to David, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.”
“**LORD,**” David pleaded, “**please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!**”

2 Samuel 17:15-20

Hushai then told the priests Zadok and Abiathar, “This is what Ahithophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel, and this is what I advised. Now **send someone quickly and tell David,** ‘Don't spend the night at the wilderness ford, but be sure to **cross over the Jordan, or the king and all the people with him will be devoured.**’”

Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En-rogel, where a servant girl would come and pass along information to them. They in turn **would go and inform King David**, because they dared not be seen entering the city. However, a young man did see them and informed Absalom. So the two left quickly and came to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had **a well** in his courtyard, and **they climbed down into it.** Then his wife took the cover, placed it over the mouth of the well, and scattered grain on it so nobody would know anything. Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house and asked, “Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?” “They passed by toward the water,” the woman replied to them. The men searched but did not find them, so they returned to Jerusalem.

❓ **Is it ever okay to LIE?** Scripture consistently places a high value on protecting innocent life. In fact, the Bible records several instances where God's people concealed the truth from evil men seeking to murder the innocent. This woman acted to protect life rather than assist wickedness.

2 Samuel 17:21-23

After they had gone, **Ahimaaz and Jonathan** climbed out of the well and went and **informed King David.** They told him, “Get up and immediately ford the river, for Ahithophel has given this advice against you.” So **David and all the people** with him got up and **crossed the Jordan.** By daybreak, there was no one who had not crossed the Jordan. When Ahithophel realized that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He set his house in order and **hanged himself.** So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

Ahithophel knew exactly what was happening. If David regained the throne, a man who had joined the rebellion at the highest level would likely face judgment. Ahithophel now apparently concluded that David's return was inevitable. Ahithophel's betrayal & hanging himself might remind us of someone who betrayed “the Son of David” - the ULTIMATE KING, and then chose to hang himself as well - Judas. Following the advice of David's advisor and spy, Absalom has now given David time to prepare for battle.

2 SAMUEL 17:24-29

David had arrived at Mahanaim by the time Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. Now Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in Joab's place. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra the Israelite; Ithra had married Abigail daughter of Nahash. Abigail was a sister to Zeruiah, Joab's mother. And Israel and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead. When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, Machir son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim brought beds, basins, and pottery items. They also brought wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, lentils, honey, curds, sheep, goats, and cheese from the herd for David and the people with him to eat. They had reasoned, “The people must be hungry, exhausted, and thirsty in the wilderness.”

Joab & his brother were NOT mentioned as being with David when he fled from Jerusalem. Although the text doesn't give any details of where they were, **it's likely that they were conducting military operations somewhere far away from Jerusalem.** So, when Joab, his brother, and all the troops with them rejoined David, his military force had grown massively.

2 Samuel 18:1-3

David reviewed his troops and appointed commanders of thousands and of hundreds over them. He then sent out the troops, a third under Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai of Gath. The king said to the troops, “I must also march out with you.” “You must not go!” the people pleaded. “If we have to flee, they will not pay any attention to us. Even if half of us die, they will not pay any attention to us because you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore, it is better if you support us from the city.”

2 Samuel 18:4-5

"I will do whatever you think is best," the king replied to them. So he stood beside the city gate while all the troops marched out by hundreds and thousands. The king commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, "**Treat the young man Absalom gently for my sake.**" All the people heard the king's orders to all the commanders about Absalom.

Even while being betrayed by his son in every way possible, David *didn't want any harm to come to his son*. He was to be taken alive & well. *How could a person continue to love someone who had hated him so much?* That's the heart of a good father - one who continues to believe for the best of his son/daughter despite what has happened in the past.

2 Samuel 18:6-7

Then David's forces marched into the field to engage Israel in battle, which took place in the forest of Ephraim. **Israel's army was defeated by David's soldiers**, and the slaughter there was vast that day—twenty thousand dead. The battle spread over the entire area, and that day **the forest claimed more people than the sword**.

A **forest** isn't a normal place for battle, but that's where it went, from the field to the forest. That kind of battle could balance out the difference in numbers, and give David's soldiers an upper hand in this kind of guerrilla warfare.

The forest claimed more people than the sword. We aren't given any details about what that means, but it sounds like God used the dangers in the forest to help David's forces fight against Absalom's forces.

2 Samuel 18:9-13

Absalom was riding on his mule when he happened to meet David's soldiers. When the mule went under the tangled branches of a large oak tree, **Absalom's head was caught fast in the tree**. The mule under him kept going, so he was suspended in midair.

One of the men saw him and informed Joab. He said, "**I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree!**" "You just saw him!"

Joab exclaimed, "Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? I would have given you ten silver pieces and a belt!"

The man replied to Joab, "Even if I had the weight of a thousand pieces of silver in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king's son. For **we heard the king command** you, Abishai, and Ittai, '**Protect the young man Absalom for me.**'

If I had jeopardized my own life—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have abandoned me."

One of the signs of Absalom's superior beauty - his thick hair (2 Sam 14:26) - is what now has him caught. Once again, we see how the forest enters in to help David conquer his enemies. God's powerful hand has literally suspended Absalom's short reign as king and ripped him off the throne.

2 Samuel 18:14-16

Joab said, "I'm not going to waste time with you!" **He then took three spears in his hand and thrust them into Absalom's chest**. While Absalom was still alive in the oak tree, ten young men who were Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him, and **killed him**. Joab blew the trumpet, and the troops broke off their pursuit of Israel because Joab restrained them.

It's over. Absalom, the 'king' is dead, the troops won't continue to fight - no reason to continue to kill their countrymen.

2 Samuel 18:17-18

They took Absalom, threw him into a large pit in the forest, and raised up a huge mound of stones over him. And all Israel fled, each to his tent. When he was alive, Absalom had taken **a pillar and raised it up for himself** in the King's Valley, since he thought, "I have no son to preserve the memory of my name." So **he named the pillar after himself**. It is still called Absalom's Monument today.

Such is the memory of Absalom's short reign as king, the king who bragged on himself built a monument, but lost his life. Rather than receiving a king's burial, he is buried like great sinners (Jos 7:26) and enemy kings (Josh 8:29) had experienced.

2 Samuel 18:19-30

Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "**Please let me run and tell the king the good news** that the LORD has vindicated him by freeing him from his enemies." Joab replied to him, "You are not the man to take good news today. You may do it another day, but today you aren't taking good news, because the king's son is dead." Joab then said to a Cushite, "Go tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed to Joab and took off running. However, Ahimaaz son of Zadok persisted and said to Joab, "No matter what, please let me also run behind the Cushite!" Joab replied, "My son, why do you want to run since you won't get a reward?"

"No matter what, I want to run!" "Then run!" Joab said to him. So Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.

David was sitting between the city gates when the watchman went up to the roof of the city gate and over to the wall.

The watchman looked out and saw a man running alone. He called out and told the king. The king said, "If he's alone, he bears good news." As the first runner came closer, the watchman saw another man running. He called out to the gatekeeper, "Look! Another man is running alone!" "This one is also bringing good news," said the king. The watchman said, "The way the first man runs looks to me like the way Ahimaaz son of Zadok runs." "This is a good man; he comes with good news," the king commented.

Ahimaaz called out to the king, "**All is well,**" and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground. He continued, "Blessed be the LORD your God! **He delivered up the men who rebelled against my lord the king.**"

The king asked, "Is the young man Absalom all right?" Ahimaaz replied, "When Joab sent the king's servant and your servant, I saw a big disturbance, but I don't know what it was." The king said, "Move aside and stand here." So he stood to one side.

2 Samuel 18:31-32

Just then the Cushite came and said, "May my lord the king hear the good news: The LORD has vindicated you today by freeing you from all who rise against you!" The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom all right?" The Cushite replied, "**I wish that the enemies of my lord the king, along with all who rise up against you with evil intent, would become like that young man.**"

There it is - *the news David DID NOT want to hear*. His son, Absalom, is dead. The PRICE TAG of David's sin in taking Bathsheba & killing Uriah has been much more expensive than he could have ever realized.

Sin always promises more than it delivers and costs more than we imagine. David's family is shattered. His kingdom has been divided. 2 of his sons are now DEAD. David is left grieving over consequences that began years earlier with a seemingly private sin.

2 Samuel 18:33

The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber above the city gate and wept. As he walked, he cried, "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! **If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!**"

David's cry is one of the saddest statements in the Bible, because it reveals a father's love that could not save. David wanted to die for Absalom, but he couldn't. A thousand years later another Son of David would come. He would look upon rebels, traitors, and sinners—not merely one rebellious son, but all of us—and He would do what David could only wish to do.

Isaiah 53:5-6

But he was **pierced** because of our rebellion, **crushed** because of our iniquities; **punishment** for our peace was **on him**, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has **punished him** for the iniquity of us all.

And 700 years after Isaiah writes... Jesus steps foot on earth, lives a perfect life & demonstrates Who He is.

Rather than step up to the THRONE, Jesus stumbled to the CROSS. Not because He was guilty; not because He deserved judgment; not because He had rebelled against the King. He went to the cross because WE DID.

✘ David looked at his rebellious son and cried, "If only I had died instead of you!" But David could not.

† Jesus looked at rebels like us and said, "I will."

🔍 Don't walk away marveling at David's love for Absalom. **Walk away marveling at Jesus' love for sinners like us!**

heretoserveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

* Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!

* Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Noel & Patricia Barnes** (813-767-2881), **Derek & Emily Beaty** (813-763-4421), or **Chris & Caitlin Day** (850-673-7920), **Glen & Margie Peacock** (850-464-1484).

Discussion questions

These questions are designed to help you LIVE what you LEARN with your family, friends, or small group.

1. What part of this week's study stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Throughout these chapters, how did God answer David's prayer in 2 Samuel 15:31? What does this teach us about prayer during difficult circumstances?
3. David was betrayed by his son, a trusted advisor, and many of the people he had led. How have you seen God remain faithful during seasons of disappointment, betrayal, or hardship?
4. Hushai's counsel was chosen over Ahithophel's because "the LORD had decreed" it, so God's purposes prevailed (2 Samuel 17:14). What does this passage teach us about God's sovereignty over human plans and decisions? How does knowing that God is ultimately in control affect the way you respond when circumstances seem out of control?
5. David commanded his soldiers to "treat the young man Absalom gently for my sake" (2 Samuel 18:5). What does David's concern for Absalom reveal about the heart of a loving father?
6. Why do you think David mourned so deeply for Absalom despite all the harm Absalom had caused him and others?
7. The consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba continued to affect his family years later. What does this passage teach us about the seriousness of sin and its long-term consequences?
8. David cried, "If only I had died instead of you" (2 Samuel 18:33). Why was David unable to actually take Absalom's place?
9. How does David's lament point us to Jesus Christ and the message of Isaiah 53:5-6?
10. Isaiah says that Jesus was pierced for our rebellion and crushed for our iniquities. How does understanding that Jesus died in your place deepen your appreciation for the gospel?
11. Is there an area of your life where you need to trust God's sovereignty, repent of sin, extend forgiveness, or rest in Christ's sacrificial love this week?
12. Who are you PRAYING FOR - to turn from their sin and trust Jesus and how are you pointing *them* to *Him*?