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The Book of 2 Samuel / 2 Samuel 18

Introduction

When I was first thinking about how I might title this section after reading it, my mind led me to the "Tears of Sin". Considering the how this chapter ends with the great lament of King David. However, when typing it out, I instantly panicked and had to check my spelling because I am known in my household for mispronouncing/misspelling and even accused of making up words. This word is considered a Homonym. A word that is spelled the same but might have different meaning or pronunciation.

Then it hit me, both of these definitions fit perfectly in this section. Sin really tears things apart and separates people and causes such great sadness and sorrow resulting in great tears. The downstream effect of sin is always destruction, pain, and sorrow. If we look back to chapter 11 at David's miserable chapter in life, a literal chapter, It should not surprise us that when we sin, we are accompanied with separation, pain, and sorrow. Through Christ we are freed from -eternal- separation, pain, and sorrow, but still may suffer from it temporally, just like David. Let this be on our minds as we cover this chapter, and the remainder of this book, and in this chapter were we will see Justice and Mercy.

Primary Text

2 Samuel 18 ESV

¹ Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. ² And David sent out the army, one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the men, "I myself will also go out with you." ³ But the men said, "You shall not go out. For if we flee, they will not care

about us. If half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore it is better that you send us help from the city.”⁴ The king said to them, “Whatever seems best to you I will do.” So the king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands.⁵ And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.” And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.⁶ So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim.⁷ And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men.⁸ The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword.⁹ And Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.¹⁰ And a certain man saw it and told Joab, “Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.”¹¹ Joab said to the man who told him, “What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt.”¹² But the man said to Joab, “Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king’s son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, ‘For my sake protect the young man Absalom.’¹³ On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof.”¹⁴ Joab said, “I will not waste time like this with you.” And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak.¹⁵ And ten young men, Joab’s armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him.¹⁶ Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained them.¹⁷ And they took Absalom and threw him into a great pit in the forest and raised over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled every one to his own home.¹⁸ Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar that is in the King’s Valley, for he said, “I have no son to keep my name in remembrance.” He called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom’s monument to this day.¹⁹ Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, “Let me run and carry news to the king that the LORD has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.”²⁰ And Joab said to him, “You are not to carry news today. You may carry news another day, but today you shall carry no news, because the king’s son is dead.”²¹ Then Joab said to the Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed

before Joab, and ran. ²² Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?" ²³ "Come what may," he said, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and outran the Cushite. ²⁴ Now David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he lifted up his eyes and looked, he saw a man running alone. ²⁵ The watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he drew nearer and nearer. ²⁶ The watchman saw another man running. And the watchman called to the gate and said, "See, another man running alone!" The king said, "He also brings news." ²⁷ The watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man and comes with good news." ²⁸ Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." ²⁹ And the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was." ³⁰ And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still. ³¹ And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king! For the LORD has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." ³² The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man." ³³ And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Call: "The grass withers and the flowers fades,"

Response: "But the word of the Lord endures forever."

~~~ [Pray]~~~

## **Israel's Civil War (v. 1-8)**

## **1.1 David's army prepares ( v.1-2)**

We have David here, after being informed of the intention of Absalom's army, preparing his own. David was a man of war. He was calculative and disciplined in this field. His army has now been and is rested. As the text describes, we have a ranking system of smaller group under the control of three primary heads, Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite. Joab would be considered general over all, but this organization allow for greater strategy. In a very Kingly way, David offers to go with the army. (he still had a job to do) The idea here would be that David would inspire, encourage, and bolster the moral of the valiant men. David seeks to lift up and keep the hearts of his men. "If you go, I will go and suffer with you."

## **1.2 The worth of the king (v. 3-4)**

The men raise concern for their king. The loss of David would indeed be catastrophic and would end this civil war with Absalom being crowned. Make no mistake Absalom would not hesitate to kill David. Yet, David would have spared Absalom. It is also true that the wicked would find no mercy for man, but it is God, that has mercy on men. The goal here on both sides is to get a check mate with as little casualties as possible since since these are all country men. This was Ahithophel's plan, to take out the leader and be done.

## **1.3 The plea of a father (v. 5)**

Of all the worlds that would have been spoken when David is addressing his commanders, we are given the focus of the Author's mind, Davids affection for his son. When he speaks of dealing gently, he is asking his men not to slay Absalom. Instead he is hoping for his capture and return.

There are three things that would be driving David's thoughts here:

- a. A father's love for his son.
- b. His own conscience, that this is the result and consequence of his own sin.
- c. The spiritual state of Absalom's soul, were he to perish.

Despite David's sentiment, Absalom rebellion is in full force and is fully committed. Absalom's rooftop act sealed before all of Israel where his heart stands. He shows no regard for David at all. He shows no repentance and no regard for God at all. David is holding on to hope. He is holding onto Faith in God, that perhaps his son Absalom might be saved even after his rebellion. What challenging place for David to be. In chapter 13, David longed for Absalom, and even more would he now.

David knew the price of Absalom's rebellion

1 Samuel 26:9 "9 But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?""

## **1.4 The price of war, the price of sin (v. 6-8)**

This price of war this day is 20 thousand Israelites. This wasn't just a selection of Israel, but all were gathered to fight, at least the ones capable. This defeat spun Absalom's army into chaos. His ranks were broken, there was confusion and a lack of order. Sin will cloud the mind. When sin is abounding we lose order and solid grounding. The confusion led to a lack of order and led to men being slaughtered in the forest of Ephraim. David's men had absolutely overtaken them. Israel would be shown here, of the devastating effects of a rebellion against God. David won partly because his men were valiant, and entirely because God was with them.

The men of Israel loved Absalom's rebellion. His act on the rooftop strengthened them. They accepted his sin and they followed his wickedness.

## **2. The cost of Absalom's rebellion (v. 9-18)**

### **2.1 The mighty will be humbled (v. 9)**

Amongst the chaos Absalom comes trotting on his mule in the forest (sons of kings), and it is in this place he is ultimately humbled. Absalom's tall nature, his

looks, and his glorious hair was set against him this day. Oh how greatest strength can be our downfall, our greatest weakness. Some offer that his perhaps he was looking back and his head was caught in a fork in an oak. But I agree with others that it was likely his crown of hair, that he was so proud of and showed off that tied him to the branch of the oak, suspending him in the air, off the ground. How humiliating.

## **2.2 The heart of Joab revealed, again (v. 10)**

Joab has real loyalty to the King, he is really loyal to David, but his heart does not show us that it is after God. He would be one that uses the phrase, "the ends justify the means." Although Joab's character is not one of obedience to God, he is however executing God's judgement. Joab has no intention of sparing Absalom. He shows no intention of carrying out the order of the King. The good soldier however, was carrying out the order of the king. The money that Joab would have given would have been a great benefit to this man and the belt would be that of offering him a place of office in the military.

## **2.3 Loyalty to the king, loyal to truth (v. 12-13)**

The man responds to Joab that even if he had multiplied it a hundred fold, he would not defy the request of the king. Remember that the three commanders were ordered in the presence of all not to kill Absalom. Doing so would violate the king's order and this good soldier was listening to his conscience and not his gain. He confessed that nothing would be hidden from the king, and if the king had found out, then Joab would likely distance himself and possibly accuse his man of this defiance and guilt.

## **2.4 The trumpet of victory (v. 14-16)**

Joab waste no more time, here is his opportunity. Matthew Poole states that Joab set to save David's life against his will. That David would have been reconcilable to his son, who was guilty of both incest with David's wives and rebellion, both of which were capital crimes by the Law of God. According to the Law he deserved death. The reality of this scene is that Joab actually had

the opportunity to capture the King's Son. To add to Joab's defiance, before he struck him, he was reminded of the king's desire. He could have been obedient, however the realization was that if he was to spare Absalom, there would have been more rebellions and uprisings.

Dale Ralph Davis says this concerning David's posture and Joab's reality. "David would treat cancer with candy. Joab knew it required surgery- and he nominated himself as surgeon."

To be fair, sparing Absalom in our right war is unrealistic, Absalom would never submit. And these were still the country men of Israel. Joab only needed to remove the leader to stop this revolt.

This was Ahithophel's strategy that Absalom did not accept.

He had a choice to make: End this rebellion right now or obey his king? This is if we consider it, a difficult situation. God pairs salvation of his Church with the judgement of his enemies. It's like Davis offers, "asking a surgeon to leave a small bit of cancer behind because it's a part of you."

We was a Man of great frame, A man who is charismatic, Handsome, a tall figure in the eyes of men.

Absalom was the son of the King

Absalom lived a life of rebellion and in absolute war against God.

The legacy of Absalom ends as we will see. He passed from this life leaving nothing good behind. Instead his legacy shows us the result of rebellious sinful life. He saved no one.

Since crushing the head of the snake there was no need to continue fighting, therefore Joab blows the trumpet of victory. Joab's actions brought an end to the war.

## **2.5 The tomb of a traitor (v. 17-18)**

This kind of burial is associated with the burial of accursed men.

### **Joshua 7:25–26 ESV**

<sup>25</sup> And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. <sup>26</sup> And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

Joshua 8:28:29 also gives is another example of a cursed king being buried in a similar fashion.

This should be a reminder to all that oppose God, and openly rebel against the creator.

After his death, the remainder of his army fled to their own home because this rebellion was over, now they might face judgement from King David.

This section ends with a segment referring to a pillar that Absalom had made from himself. Absalom had two graves, the pit of stone and the pillar he made for himself. He made it because he had no sons left, or at least none that was worthy of being an heir. He desired to make a name for himself. We saw this same self-glorification from Saul in 1 Samuel 15:12

## **3. A victory of sorrow (v. 19-33)**

### **3.1 Truth suppressed (v. 19-20)**

Ahimaaz desires to give good news, and good news in reality it was. The rebellion was over, and God’s justice had prevailed. The nation was no longer captive by Absalom. However, news of Absalom’s death would not be good news for David. It would not be a true victory for him, for he hoped to see Absalom captured and brought back so that he could win over his son.

### **3.2 Messengers are sent (v. 21-27)**

(v 21-23) Joab, although ruthless, knows this would be a miscalculation since the king would eventually find out that Joab was responsible for his son's killing. However sends the Cushite, possibly because he was a foreigner. However, Ahimaaz would ask again and be sent to also deliver the news.

Cushite-likely had taken the mountain path (shorter, but harder)

Ahimaaz-went by the way of the plain (longer but easier)

David ever watching for sign of the ward is now seen waiting at the gates.  
(v.24-27)

A single man running to the city likely indicates good news to the watchmen.

A company or many men might indicate that the army was routed or fled or possibly being pursued.

### **3.3 The lie (v. 28-30)**

Ahimaaz initiates this tidings with giving all credit to this victory to God. However, in this discussion it appears that David has only one concern on his mind, the safety of Absalom. Not the victory, not for justice. We see David's compassion clouding his judgement and overlooking justice.

This unfortunately leads to Ahimaaz, who man have been a good man, to lie to David. He choked. Of course he knows that Absalom was dead but instead he choose to lie. We might convince ourselves that in this situation, lying might be good for the person, but its inexcusable.

Likely because a second messenger was spotted, David tells Ahimaaz to turn aside and stand here.

### **3.4 The truth (v. 31-32)**

The Cushite addresses David in the same way given credit to the Lord for their deliverance. However, we see David bypassing this again, going straight to where his heart is, his son. He suspected the truth, and perhaps needed a confirmation. However, the Cushite make not hesitation in giving David the

whole truth.

### **3.5 The Lamentation (v. 33)**

Instantaneously and deeply David's heart broken and moved. Five times he cries out for his son. We are given an outburst of mourning. David, so twisted within his broken heart left for the watchtower and wept.

The weight of his sin, the penalty of defying the Lord and Nathans' judgment came flying into every facet of David's body.

We've seen David mourn before from the loss of a child, but this one seems different. In a normal historical narrative, an event like this simply describe the situation and and state that David wept deeply. However, instead we are given a distinctly recorded cry of a broken heart from a broken man. This death is noticeably different.

David is mourning from a deep sense of Absalom's eternal state. His son died in his sins without any testimony of repentance. David is dealing with his own sins and knows that he was the instrument that cause the sword to remain in his household.

## **Application and Call to Christ**

We are given in great detail David's words at the end of this chapter because the author wants us to see and hear David's anguish, to feel how deep sin tears apart this world.

Absalom has been a central figure since chapter 13 and sadly we have seen David play the passive. David has been consumed with his compassion and as a result has been passive throughout the previous chapters and here in 18. He appears to be a king that is not in control, but consumed with his grief.

So what do we see in this chapter?

That God punishes the wicked and is just in his will. (a warning for sinners)

That we have a responsibility to rule rightly, in accordance with God's will and his Word. (a warning for believers)

That sometimes we get put in difficult situations of the heart. What is a father or mother to do?

- a. Seek first the counsel of God. What is your current spiritual state? Are you active or are you passive?
  - i. As if David did not have time to discipline and counsel his son and seek restoration. How many years passed when David allowed Absalom back from exile to live near him.
    1. For 2 years he did not see David's face after exile. 4 years conspiring before naming himself king at Hebron.
  - ii. David should have been actively restoring his son and bringing him back to obedience to God's Word.
  - iii. So what stopped David from doing this? Was it a clouded mind of consumed with grief and sin?
- b. Do not let your heart cause you to wander from the foundation of God's word.
  - i. This while in practice might be more difficult , guard your heart.
  - ii. Psalm 119:9 "9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."
- c. Seek restoration early and be persistent (part of David's grief would be because now he cannot)
- d. Watch and pray against sinful indulgences and against the neglect of our children.
  - i. Recall the outcome of Eli and his sons.

David's final cries in this chapter: "Would I had died instead of you," I believe this is a sincere fatherly request. But for this king it shows that he is incapable of substitutionary atonement. That is why we point to David's Greater Son, the greater David, Jesus Christ, who did indeed die in our place, for our sins giving us real restoration.

When David Cries "Would I had died instead of you," Christ announced "I have died for you. Put your trust in me, believe what I did for you, and I will restore you, I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you, I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Christ is our victory. Believe, turn away from your sin and rejoice because the tears of sin is real, but in Christ we have them wiped away and replaced with tears of joy.

### Questions for Discipleship

1. In times of comfort and peace we are most often tempted to delay or abdicate our responsibilities. We tell ourselves lies like, "Oh I've got plenty of time" and I am sure David might have been tempted to say the same about Absalom. How can we ensure that we do not end up in a situation like this? What measures can we put in place?
2. Joab sense that David is following the grief of his heart and that his mind might be compromised. He choses to disobey the King to expedite what he thinks is the best course of action. Do we do this in our households? Do we doubt those that lead us and instead choose for them?
3. Humans are emotional creatures and are likely to lose our footing during these emotional storms. What ways can we maintain our ground? What is our fall back plan if we notice that we are beginning to fail?
4. It seems that David goes through a life of Activity and Passivity from when we first met him until now. How would you address your spiritual state? In your life now, would you consider yourself active or passive in your Christian walk? What about in the Church?
5. Who in your life do you see the need for reconciliation, are you actively pursuing it or are you procrastinating?
6. What barriers do we have in place to prevent sinful indulgences and the neglecting of our children? How do we avoid being like Eli?