

King David

Regrets

2 Samuel 18

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HDBC

Have you ever experienced victory that was tempered with a bit of sadness or grief? It is possible to experience the euphoria of victory while also sensing a sadness over the cost of that victory. It's not always that way. **There was no sadness when David defeated Goliath.** Goliath was an arrogant braggart who taunted God. I'm pretty sure there was no sadness among the Israelis **when the Egyptian army was drowned in the Red Sea.**

However, there are times when your respect or love for your adversary brings a sadness even in the wake of victory. That was true of David when he defeated the armies of his son, Absalom and regained the throne over Israel. For David to win, Absalom had to lose. And that was bittersweet!

Absalom had won the hearts of a portion of the people of Israel by promising things he could never fulfill. He told the people what they wanted to hear. And when he felt he had a strong enough following he took the risk to announce that he was now king of Israel. It was a major gamble, but he was willing to risk it.

David's initial response was surprising. He quickly packed his bags and led his family & friends out of the city into exile. He yielded without a fight. David's retreat was not an indication that he was giving up, it was a strategic move that would allow him to assess the situation and prepare for how to respond.

There is a lesson here. When you are betrayed or attacked, a strategic retreat may be the best course of action. This may keep you from saying or doing things you would likely regret. A pause before responding is often a great idea!

1. The Preparation for war (1-5)

After retreating from the city, David made the necessary preparations to regain the throne. Note four things that David did. These are things we would expect before any military engagement.

1) Organized the troops (1)

He did a headcount. It's a good idea before going to battle to know how many people are fighting with you. He then organized them under three primary leaders. Joab, Abishai and Ittai.

2) Motivated the troops (2)

David announced that he would be going to battle with them. This was primarily motivational. David was not really needed. However, his presence with the warriors would be important. It signaled that he believed in the cause and was willing to risk his own life with them. **Once before he failed to go with the army and it led to disastrous affair.**

3) Listened to the troops (3-4)

The people appreciated his offer but insisted that he stay far from the conflict. They realized that David would be a special target for the men in Absalom's army. It would be foolish for David to put himself at risk.

Not only would put himself at risk, he would put the cause at risk. He would be much more helpful if he could get himself back into the city and direct things from there. **The Allied Commanders would never have consented to General Eisenhower landing on the beaches of Normandy with the first wave of attackers.** He was much more valuable to the cause in an office safely out of reach of the enemy.

4) Instructed the troops (5)

David positioned himself at the gate and watched as each group of soldiers marched out going to battle on his behalf. As each group filed past he shared a surprising order. **Deal gently with Absalom.** In other words, capture him, don't kill him. This must have chafed the men of war who were risking their lives specifically because of Absalom. And now they were being ordered to be nice to him.

David wanted the conflict to end, but he did not want his son to get hurt. As much as I appreciate David's desire, that was probably a bit much to ask. Absalom had chosen this course of action which was inevitably going to end in war and the likely death of either David or himself.

2. The Battle (6-8)

The text goes into very little detail about the actual battle. I think we can assume from the brevity of this account that it did not go well for Absalom and was over pretty quickly. Only a few details are shared.

1) Place (6, 8)

The forest of Ephraim. Far to the northeast of Jerusalem. David apparently chose this site strategically. David was outnumbered and by fighting in the forest, rather than on an open plane the ability of each soldier was much more important than the sheer numbers of soldiers.

David also divided his force into three fighting groups, thus dividing Absalom's army and further minimizing his numerical advantage. Verse 8 tells us the forest prevented many of Absalom's soldiers from being able to flee and thus were killed.

2) Result

Absalom's army was soundly defeated and there were 20,000 casualties. What a tragedy. There would be wives with no husbands and children with no fathers because of Absalom's rebellion.

3. The Death of Absalom (9-18)

This must be one of the strangest accounts of death not only found in the Bible but in all of history. It appears as if nature itself has conspired against Absalom in defense of David. Not only has the forest been instrumental in the defeat of the army, a single tree offers surprising assistance in the capture and death of Absalom. Three details are offered.

1) Caught in a tree (9)

Absalom was attempting to escape the battlefield. He stumbles upon some of David's men and tries to make a quick escape. While riding under a large tree his head gets caught in a branch. His mule continues to run and he was left hanging. Most likely his thick hair got caught.

The soldiers seemed to have been unsure what to do next. They neither rescued, killed, nor captured the King's son. They simply rode off and reported it to Joab, their commander. They were well aware of the king's

instruction to **deal kindly** with his son. Maybe they were unsure what that meant. They simply reported that Absalom was hanging in a tree. Interesting note about the language used here. Quote NAC commentary.

The words used by the soldier to report Absalom's condition are of great theological and thematic significance: "Absalom was hanging in an oak tree." The word translated "hanging" here is used only once in the Torah (Deut 21:23) to declare that "anyone who is *hung* on a tree is under God's curse."

Absalom had rebelled against divine law by rebelling against his father and sleeping with members of David's harem (Lev 20:11). Absalom had the massive armies of Israel fighting to protect him, and he was personally equipped with a fast means of escape not afforded other soldiers—a mule. Nevertheless, in spite of these seemingly insurmountable advantages, Absalom could not escape God's judgment.

The Lord had declared in the Torah that one who dishonored his father was cursed (Deut 27:16) and likewise that one who slept with his father's wife was cursed (Deut 27:20)—Absalom, of course, had done both. Although no army had been able to catch Absalom and punish him, God himself had sent a curse against him that simultaneously caught and punished the rebel. The fearful judgments of the Torah had proven credible: the Lord had upheld his law.

Note Joab's response (11). He was shocked that the soldier had not killed the rebel. He even indicated that he would have rewarded the soldier. I love the response by the soldier (12-13). You could make me a millionaire, but I would not touch Absalom. He respected the king's wishes and no amount of persuasion or promised reward would change his mind. The man even indicated that he did not trust Joab to come to his defense if he had killed Joab.

2) Killed by soldiers (14-15)

Joab then took ten warriors to find and kill Absalom. It was a gruesome scene. Joab plunged three spears into the man hanging in the tree. Then the other men struck. Him multiple times and killed him.

3) Buried without a funeral (16-18)

They buried his body deep in the forest and covered it with a mound of stones. Interestingly, Absalom, in his pride, had previously erected a pile of stones as a monument to himself. Absalom had a pride problem. Now he is buried in a grave deep in the forest without a funeral or fanfare.

What a sad ending to a sad life. He so desperately wanted the love and acceptance of his father and never seemed to get it. So, he sought significance through rebellion. It did not end well for Absalom. It never does!

4. The Grief of David (19-33)

At this point the story truly turns bittersweet. David is glad for the victory. But his heart is broken for his prodigal son.

David received the news of the day in two messages. The first reported the victory. That must certainly have brought joy to David's heart. But that joy was tempered with grave concern. He asked the first messenger about Absalom. This man indicated that he did not know about Absalom.

The second messenger clearly reported that Absalom was dead. (31-33) **David's** worst fears had come true. Absalom was dead. David's grief was deep, heartfelt and expressed unapologetically. As he went up to his chamber over the gate he was heard saying, *O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!*

Deeply moved – means to tremble uncontrollably. His grief leads to physical movements of agitation that he cannot control.

There is more here than normal grief. Compounding and intensifying the grief of loss is the grief of regret. There were things unsaid, things unresolved, things unfixed. Now, with the death of his son those would remain undone. He is heartbroken!

So deep and open would David's grief become that he would ultimately receive a scolding by Joab. His military commander would remind David that men had risked their lives for David in fighting Absalom. For him to continue

with open, mourning for Absalom, it would be a slap in the face to the warriors who went to war for him.

Takeaways:

I only want to mention two. One from Absalom and one from David.

1. Sin cannot meet the deepest needs of the human heart

Absalom was looking for love in all the wrong places. He longed for his father's love and acceptance. He was looking for meaning and purpose in life. But he was trying to find these things through selfish, sinful actions, rather than seeking the heart and mind of God.

Vigilante justice, sexual immorality, even the power and prestige of being the king of Israel. None of these could satisfy.

2. If you have things that need to be said or done, don't hesitate

If you want to minimize the regrets at the end of your life you need to say and do the things that matter now. Waiting only increases the chance of later regrets.

Students from Strayer University set up a chalkboard on sidewalk in New York City for one day. At the top of the board was written, "Write your biggest regret." They provided a supply of colored chalk and set up a video camera to record people writing on the board. The chalkboard attracted many people walking by and was soon filled to overflowing with written regrets

Never speaking up, Not being a good husband, Not being a better friend

Should have spent more time with family, Not saying "I love you"

Never applying to med school, Not making the most of every day

As the board filled up with so many different stories, they noticed that almost all of these regrets had one thing in common. Nearly all of them involved the word "not." They were about chances not taken. They were about words not spoken. They were about dreams never pursued.