

THE GREATEST GRIEF**2 Samuel 18**

Intro: The tragic saga continues in David's family as we complete our message from last week.

Back when I was a kid there was a miniseries called the FORSYTE SAGA which was kind of a like a sixties version of Downton Abbey. It was set in the 1880s and was about a hoity toity British family. I was too young to get it back then and was just not interested and I've never sampled remakes of it since. They even have a new version of it coming out on PBS in the near future. Now, I'm only referring to it because of a play on words that came to my messed up mind as I pondered this episode in David's life. It is indeed a saga and as I thought about it I thought I could have made it into a drama miniseries called THE LACK OF FORESIGHT SAGA.

Last week we talked about David's stumbles and lack of action that resulted in tragedy upon tragedy and today's message is the sad conclusion of what was truly a completely avoidable outcome. We also talked about family squabbles and the heartbreak they cause and this week we will look at the breath taking, gut wrenching grief that is too often the result. Few things are worse than the loss of a child – David had experienced it two times before and the sad thing was, it was so preventable. Let's look at it.

Some background

- In preparation for last Sunday and again for today I suggested that you read the chapters in 2 Samuel that contain this account. From 2 Samuel 13 and all the way through into 2 Samuel 18 the story builds. Last week we covered the tragic events around David's son Amnon and his horrific mistreatment of his sister and the revenge meted out by Absalom. That revenge was Absalom's murder of Amnon.
- After Absalom had his half-brother killed he fled to his mother's homeland in Geshur where he was in exile for two years. As things settled down, well as much as things can settle down when rampant sin and wild dysfunction are left unresolved, David sent for Absalom to safely return home.
- But David still snubbed Absalom and had no relationship with him. Absalom was not exactly persona non grata but he certainly wasn't in the good graces required to be the crown prince of Israel. Absalom didn't like being out of the limelight – he thought a lot of himself and he deserved better and he decided to take what was "rightfully" his.
- So, he began a campaign of subterfuge that was designed to undermine his father's authority and win the hearts of the people. In a lot of ways he was just being a "good" politician. These days when a person wants to move into politics he starts showing up at every community event, and speaking out on issues that are near and dear to people's hearts and maybe even write a book. He wants to see his name in the lights so that he can have that coveted name recognition that will win votes come election time. Absalom interjected into people's lives and helped them to resolve conflicts – all the kinds of things a king was supposed to do. As he did it he pointed out that the king (his very own father) was shirking his duties, and making sure he, Absalom, looked very kingly as he did it.
- Finally he staged a coup. If you did your reading you know that this is recorded in 2 Samuel 15 and you see his deception of his father, David, and then his outright betrayal. He proclaimed himself king.
- And David, who once had charged at Goliath with only a sling and five stones ran away in disgrace and with a broken heart.
- But Absalom didn't know what he was messing with. In his narcissism, he was too blind to see that this man who, he had known all his life, King David was a warrior and a strategist with a faithful following that was the best and the brightest for his army. Once David turned to retake what was rightfully his, Absalom's time as king was to be short-lived.
- The problem was, as far as avoiding a tragic outcome was concerned . . .

David took charge too late

- Even in his grief David was able to mount a counter attack to reinstate his throne. Listen, *Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. 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.* 2 Samuel 18:1-2a.

- Notice again – David may have fled Jerusalem in shame but he did not leave alone. Instead, he had a huge following of the best and most experienced soldiers in the land. He also wisely set up a spy network that would keep him informed of his enemy son’s movements. In the end he skillfully strategized and worked up a winning plan. It was so well-planned that he knew Absalom and his army would be defeated.
- As he sent his commanders out in charge of the three divisions he gave them the order, *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.* 2 Samuel 18:5. Absalom may have been a betrayer, but he was still his beloved son – David wanted his son spared.
- The battle showed David’s great leadership and it was perfectly planned and executed. And Absalom and his rebel army were thoroughly routed.
- Now Absalom ran. He didn’t stand and fight like the commander he fancied himself – instead he hopped on his mule and took out through the thick forest. It was such a thicket that he got hung up in a tree. Our text says, *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.* 2 Samuel 18:9.
- If you did the background reading you may have noticed this, but let me take a quick aside here that pertains to Absalom hanging in a tree. A paragraph in 2 Samuel says this, *Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king’s weight.* 2 Samuel 14:25-26. Two hundred shekels in modern weight is five pounds! That’s a lotta hair! I’m not being an envious bald guy when I say that Absalom was a bit of a dandy. It fit with his politician profile. He appealed to the masses with his good looks and perfect hair. And that is also why so many who read this have assumed through the centuries that Absalom got his hair caught in the tree and he was dangling their by his scalp. It may have been that way, but that is not what the text says. Absalom got his head caught and there he hung helpless.
- One of the three division commanders, Joab, David’s military right-hand man, got word that Absalom had been found and he rushed to the scene. He was amazed that the soldiers had not dispatched the betrayer – but they had heard King David plead for his son’s life. Joab had certainly gotten the memo – but that did not stop him from killing the helpless Absalom with the assistance of his bodyguards.
- Joab blatantly disobeyed his King. When you encounter a poisonous snake you chop its head off. Joab was severing the head of the rebellion and it didn’t matter to him that it was the king’s son. Militarily speaking it was strategically right, but morally it was wrong.
- David’s grief would not reach a crescendo.

There was good news and there was bad news

- David received two messengers. One was merciful and only told David the good news – THE BATTLE WAS WON AND THE ENEMY WAS VANQUISHED! The rebellion was over!
- But at what cost? That was the bad news. David’s question of the messengers is pitiful, *“Is it well with the young man Absalom?”* 2 Samuel 18:32. And he received the brutal news, Absalom had been killed and many of his followers along with him. It was a personal and national tragedy. Nothing could be the same after that.

David’s deep grief

- Our text tells us, *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!”* 2 Samuel 18:33. We have seen David grieve before. In 2 Samuel 12 he mourned deeply for the son born to him and Bathsheba from their illicit and murderous affair. And then again we saw it in our text last week when he mourned the death of his son Amnon. But this grief described here in this case is palpable. *“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”* It’s wrenching just to read it. It’s the grief of the family who lost their dad and grandpa in motorcycle wreck on Thursday or the family of the Amish man who’s buggy was crushed last

week, or the parents and loved ones of the children and teachers killed by a student in Georgia. The grief of people who sent their loved ones out in the morning, fully expecting them home again in the evening. It's the grief that sucks the air out of your very being.

- David was grieving like this. But what did he expect? How did he think this was going to end?
- David was justified in his grief. He'd lost his son. Charles Spurgeon puts it this way, "*Our children may plunge into the worst of sins, but they are our children still. They may scoff at our God; they may tear our heart to pieces with their wickedness; we cannot take complacency in them, but at the same time we cannot unchild them, nor erase their image from our hearts.*"
- I think David's grief was deepened by the fact that this all had been so avoidable! He had so many regrets. What could I have done better?
- It's harsh, but I believe I agree with David Guzik when he writes, "*David was so deeply moved because he knew that he supplied the soil this tragedy grew from.*" And then he suggests this and I agree

The soil came from David's indulgent parenting.

The soil came from David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah.

The soil came from David's own sinful indulgence of his passions and smaller rebellions against God, which sins and weaknesses were magnified in his sons.

- David's deep sorrow shows that we need to practice what we preach to our kids. Gusik writes, "*It isn't enough that parents train their children to be godly; they must first train themselves in godliness.*" And G. Campbell Morgan says this. "*We cannot stand in the presence of that suffering without learning the solemn lessons of parental responsibility it has to teach, not merely in training our children, but in that earlier training of ourselves for their sakes.*"
- In other words David was grieving deeply because he was thinking of what might have been and what could have been if he had really been a man after God's own heart in his family relationships. His was the deepest grief.

Conclusion: It's easy to sit in judgment 3,000 years later as we are on the outside of Holy history and looking in. But we can learn from this. We must learn from this.

- There are lots of things we as parents and grandparents and people of influence can take from David's tragedy. Let's not give in to an increasingly permissive society that tells us we can let a 4 year old decide whether they are a boy or a girl. Let's not acquiesce to a society that tells us kids will be kids and sex is just a natural thing when kids get together. Let's not surrender to a culture that says the Bible is outmoded and has nothing to offer for everything – not just parenting.
- Let's start now to make sure we have no regrets. That way, even though grief may and will come, we can look back and know that we obediently followed the good directions we find here in God's word. Amen.