

20. The final day of the rebel prince

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When we were living on the southwest side of Tucson, we had a small lawn that required winter ryegrass seeds. I didn't know much about growing or taking care of the grass. So a friend of mine took care of that. Bless his heart! From the following morning, I didn't know how the words got around, we've been having visitors with wings from all over Pima County. From sparrows to pigeons, they must have sent out e-mails and voice mails to let every bird know that there are seeds at the Kims' back yard.

In the beginning, I shooed them off. That didn't work. So I shot a few of them with my plastic BB guns. That also didn't work. It only annoyed them .

Finally, I got some help from another friend of mine. He loaned me his pellet rifle. So I started to hunt pigeons. I lost count. It is somewhere around twenty-some birds dead, and many of them left half of their feathers on my back yard.

The incredible thing about this is that these pigeons still come down to my back yard where their buddies laid dead. They would go around them and peck seeds. It seems that they are at least concerned that there is someone who is going to shoot at them and the seeds they are eating might be their last meal. They were after those seeds in spite of their death waiting for them.

Absalom started his political career with his vanity, deception, charisma, and popularity. Instead of depending on God's will and guidance, he used manipulation, violence, and his personal charm to attract people to his side. Though his dying fate is written on the wall, this rebel prince charming is heading to his first and last battle against his father's army which was far superior in combat skills.

A. DAVID'S ARMY PREPARING FOR A BATTLE AGAINST ABSALOM

2 Samuel 18:1-5 And David numbered the people who were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. 2 Then David sent out one third of the people under the hand of Joab, one third under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I also will surely go out with you myself." 3 But the people answered, "You shall not go out! For if we flee away, they will not care about us; nor if half of us die, will they care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us now. For you are now more help to us in the city." 4 Then the king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do." So the king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands. 5 Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom.

David knew that the commander belonged out in the battle. He didn't want to repeat his mistake of not going to battle before when he should have. But the people surrounding David would not hear of him going out to battle with the rest of his army. There were four reasons why they insisted on this:

- His life was more valuable than anyone wanted by Absalom.
- He could bring reserves if needed.

- They understood that it would be hard for David to fight against his own son Absalom.
- They also knew that he is an aged king, cannot move fast like he used to do.

David was not stubborn. He knew how to take the good advice of others. He did not give up on leadership. He practiced good leadership by listening to the wise advice of the people around him.

They were willing to take on sacrifice and danger for the benefit of their king. Their devotion to David is an example of how the believer should be devoted to our King Jesus Christ.

David wanted it clearly known that Absalom was to be captured alive and not mistreated in any way. All the army heard him give this order, I think some smiled, but others were a bit resentful.

My heart goes out for David the father of this troubled son Absalom. However, he is the cause of all these problems. He needs to eliminate this Absalom once and for all. When we face sins in our lives, we cannot deal with them in kindness or gentleness. We need to cut off anything with sins in our lives. Remember, God cares about our character more than our comfort.

B. THE BATTLE RAGES

2 Samuel 18:6-7 So the people went out into the field of battle against Israel. And the battle was in the woods of Ephraim. 7 The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David, and a great slaughter of twenty thousand took place there that day. 8 For the battle there was scattered over the face of the whole countryside, and the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

This was a civil war. It was a terrible thing. There were civil wars in the United States as well as in Korea – South against North. We know the sadness of brother fighting against brother.

David was a good military strategist and a general, and Absalom did not have anyone in his group who could match David's ability or the ability of David's three commanders.

I am sure that you have noticed Israel was against David. After the death of Solomon, 11 tribes in the northern area made themselves kingdom Israel, and one remaining tribe Judah made itself a kingdom, too.

David had arranged that the battle should take place in this terrain, where the experience and courage of each individual soldier counted more than sheer numbers.

The troops of Absalom became entangled in the woods of Ephraim when they attempted to flee from David's army. They were boxed in. The forest became the cause of death for many of them rather than the sword. This is obviously God's intervention for David.

C. THE VANITY OF ABSALOM KILLED HIM

2 Samuel 18:9-13 Then Absalom met the servants of David. Absalom rode on a mule. The mule went under the thick boughs of a great terebinth tree,

and his head caught in the terebinth; so he was left hanging between heaven and earth. And the mule which was under him went on. 10 Now a certain man saw it and told Joab, and said, "I just saw Absalom hanging in a terebinth tree!" 11 So Joab said to the man who told him, "You just saw him! And why did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a belt." 12 But the man said to Joab, "Though I were to receive a thousand shekels of silver in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king's son. For in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Beware lest anyone touch the young man Absalom!' 13 Otherwise I would have dealt falsely against my own life. For there is nothing hidden from the king, and you yourself would have set yourself against me."

Absalom's vanity sent himself into this battle by following the counsel of Hushai. Absalom was not a soldier, nor was he a general. Besides he was riding a mule into battle. Mule has the strength to carry a heavy load, not necessarily for speed that is required in battle.

Absalom was noted for his good looks and his luxurious hair. What was his glory was now his curse. Absalom is literally caught by his own hair in the thick oak trees of the forest.

Absalom could cut off his hair from the tree branch and escape. But knowing Absalom, he simply tried to free himself with his hair and all. He was trying to keep his vanity and ended up losing his life.

Christians often replace their walk with Christ for the sake of vanities of this world, such as fame, achievements, alcohol, drug, sex, and fortune. In results, they end up paying the ultimate price and penalty for their pride.

While a rich man can be proud of what he has, a poor man can be proud of his "honor" in having less; while a talented woman can boast about what she can do, a woman with no talent can boast of her hard work; while a religious man looks down on others with his religion, an unbeliever pushes out his chest in pride for his unbelief.

There may be as much pride inside a beggar's rags as in rich people's tuxedos and evening gowns. Pride is a strange creature, it never objects to its lodgings. It will live comfortably enough in a huge mansion, and it will live equally at its ease in a ghetto.

D. THE END OF THE REBEL PRINCE

2 Samuel 18:14-18 Then Joab said, "I cannot linger with you." And he took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom's heart, while he was still alive in the midst of the terebinth tree. 15 And ten young men who bore Joab's armor surrounded Absalom, and struck and killed him. 16 So Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing Israel. For Joab held back the people. 17 And they took Absalom and cast him into a large pit in the woods, and laid a very large heap of stones over him. Then all Israel fled, everyone to his tent. 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up a pillar for himself, which 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 to this day it is called Absalom's Monument.

Absalom only received what he deserved. He was a murderer of his brother, a traitor to his father and the kingdom, and a rapist of his father's concubines. Joab knew

that David was generally too indulgent towards his children and would never punish Absalom.

We might say that Joab was correct but not right. He was correct in understanding that it was better for David and Israel that Absalom was dead. He was not right in disobeying king David, the God-appointed authority over him.

Rather than returning Absalom's body to Jerusalem for honorable burial, Joab had it buried in a large pit in the woods. The heap of stones that covered the grave may have been symbolic of stoning, the legal penalty due to a rebel son.

Setting up his own pillar is what we would expect from self-centered, self-promoting Absalom. Absalom did have three sons according to 2 Samuel 14:27. From this statement, we assume that they died before their father did.

Both Absalom and Ahithophel died on trees, and to an Israelite, hanging a body on a tree was evidence that the deceased was cursed by God according to Deuteronomy 21:22–23. When you consider the crimes these two men committed, is it any wonder they were cursed? Yet God in His grace forgave David of his crimes and allowed him to live.

E. RUNNING IN VAIN

2 Samuel 18:19-32 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Let me run now and take the news to the king, how the Lord has avenged him of his enemies." 20 And Joab said to him, "You shall not take the news this day, for you shall take the news another day. But today you shall take no news, because the king's son is dead." 21 Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." So the Cushite bowed himself to Joab and ran. 22 And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "But whatever happens, please let me also run after the Cushite." So Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, since you have no news ready?" 23 "But whatever happens," he said, "let me run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by 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 over the gate, to the wall, lifted his eyes and looked, and there was a man, running alone. 25 Then the watchman cried out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he came rapidly and drew near. 26 Then the watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, "There is another man, running alone!" And the king said, "He also brings news." 27 So 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 And Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, "All is well!" Then he bowed down with his face to the earth before the king, and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king!" 29 The king said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant and me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what it was about." 30 And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still. 31 Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "There is good news, my lord the king! For the Lord has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you." 32 And the king said to the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" So the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm, be like that young man!"

Joab was reluctant to let Ahimaaz bear the news of Absalom's death to David because he did not have all the necessary information to give the king. Because he insisted that he wanted to run with victory news to the king even though Joab selected someone else.

Notice that David's chief concern is not for which side won the battle, rather for the safety of Absalom. *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* But Ahimaaz did not have all of the necessary information to tell the king. He did not know that Absalom was dead.

Ahimaaz wanted to run. Maybe he knew he was a better runner than anyone else. But he insisted. Maybe because it was his pride. Even though he ran, he was set aside for the one who had the actual message. In other words, he ran in vain.

Many people are like that today – running without a message. Preaching without a message. Jumping into something without waiting to hear from God. Preachers and Bible teachers must wait upon the Lord to have His message, not human opinion.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) When we face sins in our lives, we cannot deal with them in kindness or gentleness. We must see our sins the way the Lord sees.**
- 2) Our walk with Christ should not be replaced with the vanities that the world offers.**
- 3) Doing God's work without Him is in vain and it is nothing more than a self-satisfaction and self-gratification which are big "NOs" in Christian walk.**