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2 SAMUEL 18:1-19:8a

Last week we saw that David's son, Absalom, mounted a rebellion against David. We saw that David was forced to flee from Jerusalem.

Today, we're going to see a battle...a battle between Absalom and **his** army and David's army.

I believe today's lesson is one of the saddest passages of Scripture in God's Word...and without a doubt it's one of the saddest incidents in the life of David.

In the last part of **chapter 17**, we see David being pursued by Absalom. And as **chapter 18** opens, we see David setting his military leaders in place. David was an old man...but he was a veteran of many battles.

He had fought and won many wars. He knew military strategy and he wasn't about to give up his kingdom without a fight.

God had anointed David king of Israel. David had not **sought** to be king. He had not **run** for office. God had looked for a man after His own heart to replace Saul and He had found that **man in a little shepherd boy**.

God took David out of the sheep pastures because David had learned to trust Him. God knew if David trusted Him in the little things of life, he would also trust Him in the big things in life.

David had learned this lesson so well, that he would sit down and write many psalms praising the fact that he could depend on Jehovah to meet his every need. The one we always remember the most is the **Twenty-third Psalm**, isn't it? But, there were so many others, as well.

David wasn't a **perfect** man. He had not led a **perfect** life. He had made some major mistakes...but he had such a love for God and he always came back to God with a broken and contrite heart.

And one thing he knew...and that was that God had anointed him king of Israel...not Absalom.

So, David was willing and prepared to go to battle for his rightful place as king of Israel. He may have fled away from Jerusalem temporarily, but he wasn't planning on staying away from Jerusalem permanently!

2 Samuel 18:1-5...

David had come to Mahanaim. Mahanaim was a city on the other side of the Jordan River in the land of Gilead.

David put 1/3 of his army under Joab's command...1/3 of his army under Abishai's command and the other 1/3 of his army under the command of Ittai, the Gittite...

And then he said,

"I myself will surely go out also."

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But, the people were afraid for him to go. They wanted David to stay at Mahanaim and advise them from there. They all insisted that he was worth at least ten thousand of his men. He was the prize piece in the war. The enemy forces in their drive to gain power would center their attacks on capturing him. **And if he were taken, then the battle would be lost!**

Verse 4... *“...so the king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands.”*

Now, here is this old king...standing beside the gate...not the gate of Jerusalem, but the gate of Mahanaim...a city to which he had been forced to flee because of the rebellion and conspiracy of his own son...and what does he do?

He charges each commander...Joab, Abishai and Ittai...
“Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.”

Had David dealt with Absalom when he should have done it...would it have come to this? David was willing for good men to be go into battle and die, yet he warned them to deal gently with the very one who was causing the good men to risk their lives!

Right or wrong...there's not a one of us who cannot identify with this, is there? I mean, you and I have never been king of anything, but we who have children know that no matter what they do...we **still** love them.

David was not a perfect father. Most of this, if not all of this, had been brought on by his own sin...but he still loved Absalom.

So, the people went out to battle and this passage tells us the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. And **verse 7** tells us Israel was defeated by the servants of David... **“and the slaughter that day was great...20,000 men.”**

Verse 8b...

David had gathered his army in haste.
Absalom had the bigger army.
Absalom's army was much better equipped.
Absalom's army had more and better weapons.

But, this verse says,

“...the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.”

It's as though all nature itself had turned against Absalom. And this tells me it doesn't matter how **tough** you are, or how **mean** you are, **if God doesn't fight for you, you're in trouble!**

God made the sun stand still for Joshua! God will go to any lengths to enable His people to be victorious when they are fighting a righteous fight!

“Some trust in horses and some in chariots...but we will trust in the name of the LORD, our God.”
Psalm 20:7

Absalom's army was bigger and better, but when they got out there in the woods, the woods devoured them.

Now, how did this happen? I don't know!

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Maybe they just kept running into trees and finally ran into enough trees that they killed themselves. I don't know!

It was probably that the woods were full of pits and ravines and holes and thickets and the army of Absalom were unfamiliar with it... Or it was more likely that the Lord just used the woods to confuse them as He had confused the enemy of His people on previous occasions in the Old Testament.

Twenty thousand men died...some by the sword, but most were killed by the forest!!

And although we don't know exactly how they **all** died, we **do** know how Absalom died!

Verse 9...

Absalom was known throughout the kingdom for his beautiful heavy hair...and it proved here to be his undoing.

What a humiliating thing to happen to such a proud and arrogant man.

Here is a man who is so certain he will sit on the throne that he mounts a conspiracy and rebellion against his own father and leads a vast army against his father's army and goes under a tree and gets caught by its branches.

This young man had never been a soldier. He imagined himself a hero. He wore no helmet. He had no armor.

What did he know about war?

So, Absalom was riding on a mule and he encountered his father's army and as the mule went under the thick branches of a huge oak tree, Absalom's head got caught and there he was...hanging there by his hair...and his mule kept on going.

Absalom must not have even been carrying a sword or a dagger, or if he had been it apparently had been dropped. At any rate, Absalom couldn't cut himself free and there he was...helpless and hanging from a tree.

One of David's soldiers came upon Absalom and went and told Joab. Joab couldn't believe the soldier hadn't killed Absalom.

Joab even offered him a reward of 10 pieces of silver and a belt to kill Absalom, but the servant had heard David say,
"Deal gently from my sake with the young man, Absalom"
and he wasn't about to kill the king's son...even for a hundred times greater reward.

It was also obvious that this young man didn't trust Joab.

Verse 13... In other words, "If I had killed the king's son, I would have borne all the blame."

Verses 14-18...

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Joab took matters into his own hands. Joab disregarded the wishes of David and killed David's son.

By the way, I think it's very interesting that we don't see David coming after Joab for doing this, do we?

WHY? Maybe it's because Joab still had "the letter" that David had sent instructing Joab to place Uriah in the hottest part of the battle.

I believe we see from this that David had not only lost control over his family...but he had lost control over his army!

And of course, the question comes to us...**should** Joab have done this? **Should** Joab have killed David's son?

Well, of course, the mother in each of us says, "**Oh no! He shouldn't have!**"

But, although Joab was not a man of sterling character, I believe he was doing what he really thought was right.

We need to remember that Absalom wanted **David** dead and he wanted all of **David's men** dead, as well. Absalom wanted to be king.

Joab was a hard-boiled, tough military commander whose main objective was to put down Absalom's rebellion and bring the king back to Jerusalem.

Joab also saw this as a way to spare the nation from a long and bloody civil war that would cost many more lives than had already been lost and perhaps end in defeat for David. **He also saw it as a means to safeguard his own position.**

So, Joab had no compunction in killing Absalom. He even took Absalom and threw him into a deep pit in the forest and erected a great heap of stones on top of his grave.

Two runners came to bring the news to David...and when David saw them, he just knew they were bringing good news!

Well, they **were** bringing good news...good news of victory for David's army...no more civil war...David could plan on returning to Jerusalem!

But, they were **also** bringing bad news!

Verses 28-32...

And suddenly the father in David really comes out...

Verse 33...

In the depths of agony and anguish, in his outpouring of deep sorrow, David didn't care about the victory.

He didn't care that the nation had been spared a prolonged civil war. He didn't care about the families of the 20,000 dead Israelites. All he cared about was the loss of Absalom!

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And word of his grief and mourning spread...

19:1-4...

Those who had chosen to follow David instead of Absalom...

Those who had fought so bravely to put an end to this terrible civil war...

Those who had been victorious for David's kingdom...

were forced by David's grief to creep back into the city...humiliated by their victory instead of proudly marching back in triumph.

Verses 5-7...

Well, whether you agree with what Joab did or not...you've got to admire his courage to confront David.

Joab said,

"You have disgraced and shamed all the warriors who risked their lives for you! We saved you, your wives, your family and your kingdom!

You act as if you love your enemies and hate your friends! So much so that you give the impression it would have pleased you if we had all perished and Absalom had survived!"

David was silent! David was stunned by Joab's words...David knew Joab was telling the truth!

Then Joab said,

"Get out of your self-centered grief! Get out among your men and share some of their suffering! Get out to the gate of the city and give encouragement and cheer to those men who are coming home!

Because if you don't...all your people will desert you, and you will be abandoned, and this will be worse than all the evil that has ever come upon you so far!"

And what did David do?

Verse 8a...

As we said before...this is a very sad story in the life of David.

In closing, I just want us to see some truths in this passage...some things we can apply to our own lives today...

1) God's promises never fail.

God had promised David that the sword would never depart from his house and that He would raise up evil against David from his own household.

AND GOD DID THAT!!

David's sin with Bathsheba brought all kinds of heartache to David and his family...**incest, rape, murder, conspiracy, rebellion, treason**...all within his own family!

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But...

God had also promised David He would establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Absalom was apparently the heir to the throne...

Absalom died leaving no male heirs...

Absalom had two sons, but they must have died in infancy, because **verse 18** tells us he had no sons to carry on his name.

But, God had not chosen **Absalom**, had He? God had chosen **Solomon!** And it was through Solomon that God would continue David's "forever kingdom."

God's promises to you and to me are "yea and amen". They are "yes in Christ Jesus." We can depend on them! ***He is the same yesterday, today and forever...He changes not!***

2) **Blind ambition always brings tragedy.**

Absalom didn't consult God. Absalom didn't consult Nathan. Absalom cared nothing for his father. Absalom simply wanted to be king and he didn't care how he had to go about it to get it!

And in the end, Absalom swung by his hair from the limb of an oak tree while three spears were thrust into his heart!

When a man or woman insists on his or her own way and never consults God...you can be sure tragic events will take place. We may see folks who are wicked and they are very ambitious and they seem to be prospering...but God isn't through with them yet.

We've seen this happen in our lifetime in the lives of people in high places. Bill and I were talking about this this week and the Kennedys came to mind.

Joseph Kennedy was determined one of his sons was going to be president. He groomed his eldest son for the job. And in trying to be a hero, young Joe Kennedy lost his life in WWII.

So, the push came upon John. And he fulfilled his father's dreams, but was assassinated.

Then the pressure was upon Robert and we know he was killed as well. By the time it got to Ted, he had messed up his life so badly, even the Kennedy name and money couldn't help him.

Blind ambition has taken its toll on more folks in government than we have the time to cover this morning. And it's not limited to the Democrats!

Didn't John Dean write a book called BLIND AMBITION after the Watergate mess?

And you and I could probably relate the same thing happening in our own families.

Well, not only do we see in today's lesson that

God's promises never fail...

And that **blind ambition always brings tragedy...**

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3) Postponed reconciliation can be disastrous.

David didn't discipline Amnon.
David didn't discipline Absalom.
Nor did David ever attempt any full reconciliation with Absalom.

It's as though David was trying to sit on the proverbial fence...no discipline, but no loving and forgiving reconciliation!

Restoration isn't the same as reconciliation!

If there is anyone you need to be reconciled with...whether the circumstances are your fault or theirs...I want to tell you on the authority of the Word of God...go, be reconciled with them!

I want us to think for a moment about what this lack of reconciliation and forgiveness caused. David and Absalom were separated for **five years**. Absalom had fled to Syria after having Amnon killed and he stayed there for three years...and then when he came back to Israel, he didn't see his father for two years.

Think of the wasted years! Think of the opportunities missed for David to share the love and forgiveness of Jehovah with his son.

Should David have punished Absalom? YES! But, he also should have extended to his son the same grace and forgiveness God had extended to him. But, David did neither!!

And I believe this is why we see David grieving so desperately for Absalom. We didn't see that kind of grief when David's baby died, did we? David prayed and prayed for God to heal the baby, and when God took the baby, what did David do? **He anointed himself, changed clothes, accepted what God had done, and got on with life.**

What was the difference between how David handled the death of his baby and the death of Absalom?

I believe it was that David was sure his baby went to heaven to be with God... "I will go to him, he cannot return to me."

He wasn't so sure about Absalom. From all indications, Absalom was not a child of God...and David knew he had missed his chance to share the Lord with him. And I believe David lived with this burden on his heart all the days of his life.

I believe David feared he would never see Absalom again!

If there is anyone in your family or outside your family that you need to share Jesus with...don't waste any more time! Do it this week!!! How sad to miss this opportunity because of stubborn pride...how sad to have to live with those regrets all the rest of our lives.

Well, one more truth and we'll be through...

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4) Personal sorrow mustn't destroy our personal responsibility to God.

No doubt David's grief was genuine! One reason was because David knew what he had done to contribute to Absalom's rebellion.

I read this on one of my flip calendars this week...

"Children learn best from example; the trouble is, they don't know a good example from a bad one."

Absalom had learned well from his father. And the bad things he had seen in his father had stuck with him. They had become his lifestyle.

And I believe David grieved because of this, and also because of the fact that he knew he had never truly reconciled with Absalom. David restored Absalom to Jerusalem, but Absalom was never truly reconciled to the heart of his father.

No one knew better than David that he had sown the wind and he was reaping the whirlwind!

No doubt David wished he had died in Absalom's place.

No doubt David was concerned about Absalom's soul and where Absalom would spend eternity!

What a weight of grief and guilt David must have borne!

But, David was God's anointed king! No one would be able to reunite this divided bunch of Israelites but David!

And Joab knew this! Joab knew the people wanted and needed a strong leader and David was it!
"To whom much is given, much is required!"

David didn't have the luxury of a prolonged grief period. He had a kingdom to reestablish and run!

You and I don't have a kingdom to run like David did, but God has placed in our lives certain tasks that He wants us to do for His kingdom.

And when grief and sorrow come into our lives...**and it has and it will again**...we are to grieve...yes, but at some point we have to get on with the tasks at hand.

And God may send someone to **us** as He did to David!

We may not have an entire nation depending on us, but **someone** is! And as we grieve we must grieve not as those who have no hope...but as those who do have hope!

We can't undo the sins and guilt of our past failures...but God can use them for good in our lives and the lives of others. He did in David's life and He will in ours!