

Chastised: Absalom's Revolt

Behold Our God! – Read the Bible for Life Series #21

2 Samuel 12-19

Pastor David Sunday

February 26, 2012

[As told by King David:]

*“And now, O Lord, for what do I wait?
My hope is in you.
Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool!
I am mute; I do not open my mouth,
for it is you who have done it.
Remove your stroke from me;
I am spent by the hostility of your hand.
When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin,
you consume like a moth what is dear to Him;
surely all mankind is a mere breath!”¹*

You may recognize those words from the 39th Psalm. But I remember them as the anguished outcry of my soul. I wrote them when God's rod of discipline was heavy upon me. I was spent by the hostility of His hand. All that was dear to me had been consumed like a moth drawn into the fierce intensity of a candle's blaze. I felt I could bear God's rebuke not a moment longer.

My name is David. King David. The son of Jesse. I was chosen by the LORD to be Israel's anointed King. You may know me as "*a man after God's own heart.*"² But to be honest, I have a hard time ever seeing myself that way. "*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*"³ Oh, please don't misunderstand: I love God with all my heart! There's nothing I desire more than Him.⁴ My soul thirsts for Him, my flesh yearns for Him like a desert traveler gasping for water.⁵

¹ Psalm 39:7-13

² 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22

³ Psalm 51:3

⁴ Psalm 73:25

⁵ Psalm 143:6

But often I have gone astray from the Lord like a lost sheep.⁶ Grievously I have sinned against the LORD.⁷ Many of my sins are hidden⁸—hidden from you, and even unknown to me—but the Searcher of Hearts knows them all.⁹

And some of them you know too. You have heard the sordid tale of my sin with Bathsheba.¹⁰ I hate to talk about it, it pains me whenever I think of it—but as long as I live, I'll never be able not to think of it. I exploited her. I demeaned her. I violated her. Then I deceived her husband and when he proved to be a better man than I, I discarded him. I set him up to be killed as he was loyally fighting my battle.

I was—I, King David, am—a moral monster.

In the weeks and months that followed, outwardly everything appeared normal—I married Bathsheba, she was expecting a baby and the Kingdom was prospering. I went to meetings, I gave speeches, I sat on my throne giving judgments, keeping as busy as a King can be, doing my utmost to put the whole debacle out of my mind. But day and night God's hand was heavy upon me. Inwardly, I felt like my bones were wasting away. My strength was dried up like a stream in the July desert.¹¹

I'd go to the temple, but couldn't pray. I'd open the Torah, but couldn't concentrate to read it. And worst of all, I could not repent. I could not bring myself to acknowledge what I had done. I was comatose in my own wretchedness. I was blinded by my own hypocrisy. I was senseless to the bounty of God's grace towards me. And I was reckless in the face of sin's consequences.

Those were some of the darkest days of my life but I could not see that the darkness was inside me. The enemy was within the citadel of my own soul.

Then one day the prophet Nathan came to me.¹² He told me a story of two men in a certain city. One was filthy rich and the other was dirt poor. The rich man robbed the poor man of the only thing he had—one little ewe lamb who was precious to him. I was furious! I could think of nothing but finding that wicked man and sentencing Him

⁶ Psalm 119:176; Isaiah 53:6; Matthew 18:12

⁷ 2 Samuel 12:13

⁸ Isaiah 59:1-2

⁹ Psalm 139:1, 23

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 11

¹¹ Psalm 32:3-4

¹² 2 Samuel 12

to death. Gladly I would have killed him with my own sword because he did such a thing and had no pity.

That's when Nathan's gaze pierced my soul. He arrested me with His eyes and I knew I was caught before he spoke a word. To this day, I shudder when His next words echo in my mind. He looked at me and said, "*You are the man!*"

At last, I was stripped of my defenses. The monster within me was unveiled. My icy heart was melting. And I found myself trembling at the Word of the LORD, as Nathan drove the two-edged sword till it penetrated my inmost being.

Nathan said to me:

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite...with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'"

What could I say? Though my whole world was crashing down upon my head, it came almost as a sweet relief to finally be found out—and as impossible as it was for me to admit it all those months, there now seemed to open before me a fountain of cleansing and oh, how I longed to dive in and lose all my guilty stains.¹³

Honestly, with a broken and believing heart, I confessed: "I have sinned against the LORD"—that's all it took, and the floodgates of God's mercy burst opened wide.¹⁴ "Mercy there was great, and grace was free, Pardon there was multiplied to me."¹⁵

Nathan looked at me said, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die." To this day, I cannot get over it—"My Lord, what love is this, that pays so dearly? That I, the guilty one, may go free?"¹⁶

¹³ There is a Fountain Filled with Blood by William Cowper

¹⁴ Here is Love, Vast as the Ocean by William Rees & Robert Lowry

¹⁵ At Calvary by William R. Newell & Daniel B. Towner

¹⁶ My Lord, What Love is This by Graham Kendrick

God has created in me a clean heart.¹⁷ He has restored to me the joy of His salvation.¹⁸ He has put a new song in my heart, a song of praise to my God and many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.¹⁹ God has done this.

He has not dealt with me according to my sins, nor repaid me according to my iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove my transgressions from me.²⁰

Bless the LORD, O my soul! And all that is within me, bless His holy name!²¹

How sweet it is to be forgiven! How sweet it is to know that when I stand before God, He will not see me as a sinner—He will receive me as a saint—a man after God's own heart! *"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."*²²

I tell you, God forgave me that day and He will not hold these sins against me in the judgment. But there is something very serious I need to tell you. In doing so, I hope to spare you enormous pain in your lifetime.

It's been many years now since my sin with Bathsheba. I know I'm forgiven and believe with all my heart God won't hold my sins against me in the Judgment. But it still stings.

Years have passed—every one of them riddled with pain. I'm still suffering the consequences of my sins. I'd do anything if I could go back to the point when lust first started rising in my heart. If only I could repent then. If only I could change my vote—if only I could deny my lusts the power of reigning in my heart. But I can't. I let the cancer grow and God has been doing surgery on my soul ever since.

Know this, my friends: **Forgiven sins may still sting.**²³ Be sure of this: **Pardoned sins can produce lasting pain.**

¹⁷ Psalm 51:10

¹⁸ Psalm 51:12

¹⁹ Psalm 40:3

²⁰ Psalm 103:10-12

²¹ Psalm 103:1

²² Psalm 32:1-2

²³ This phrase was inspired by the title of a sermon preached by James Adams, found on the Gospel Coalition website: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/a/Forgiven-Sins-Still-Sting>

We live in a created world, ruled by a Holy God. He has revealed His will to us with utter clarity.

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.²⁴*

Friends, do not be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows he will reap. You are harvesting today seeds that were previously planted; and you are planting today things that you will one day harvest.²⁵ You are making choices today that will impact future generations with consequences far deeper and broader than you can possibly imagine. Today you are saying YES to things and NO to things—and the things you say YES to and the things you say NO to will all one day yield a harvest.²⁶

I would do anything if I could go back and say NO to the beauty I saw bathing on that rooftop in that fateful spring many years ago. But I cannot go back. The YES I said then to my lusts planted a toxic seed in the garden of my family and now in the autumn of my life I am reaping its bitter fruit.

Forgiven sins still may sting. Pardoned sins can produce lasting pain.

Let me tell you my tale of tears, for I hope to spare you some. It all revolves around three of my sons.

²⁴ Psalm 19:7-11

²⁵ Galatians 6:7-8

²⁶ The last three sentences were adapted and revised from a sermon preached by Paul Tripp, "David and Absalom," <http://thegospelcoalition.org/resources/a/2-Samuel-15---David-and-Absalom>.

First, there was my infant son—he who was conceived through my adultery with Bathsheba.²⁷ Oh, how I loved him—and yet I always knew I did not deserve him. For I really robbed him from another man as I took that man's wife and made her my own.

My heart was crushed when the prophet told me, "*The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.*"

When our baby became sick, I cried out to God. I fasted. I went in to God's presence. I lay all night on the ground. My servants would bring me food; they tried to get me up but I refused to eat. And then, on the seventh day of his illness, our baby died. My servants were afraid to tell me, so great was my grief at His illness. But I knew this was the hand of the Lord. My son is with the Lord and I cannot get him back—but by God's grace, I will one day join him in God's presence.

So I arose, washed and anointed my face with oil and changed my clothes. And I went into the house of the LORD and worshiped Him. His mercy sustained me and His mercy followed us, too. "*Surely goodness and mercy have pursued me all the days of my life.*"²⁸

God's mercy sustained me through all my grief—and in His mercy God granted us another son; we named him Solomon. He was a token of God's mercy to Bathsheba and me. But he was so loved by the LORD that God told Nathan the prophet to give Him a new name: Jedidiah, beloved of the LORD. That's who I am--beloved of the Lord. God disciplines me not because He hates me but because He loves me. Not because He's against me but because He's against the sin that would destroy me.

So sins forgiven may sometimes still sting, but the sting is a reminder of God's love. The sting of losing my infant son was not the end of it for me. Let me tell you about Amnon, my insolent son.²⁹

Amnon was my oldest boy, the Crown Prince, the heir to my throne. He was a lot like his father—he knew what he wanted and he was determined to have his way at all costs, the kind of child that makes you nervous as a parent. But I never in my worst nightmare could've imagined where his willful heart would lead him.

²⁷ 2 Samuel 12

²⁸ Psalm 23:6

²⁹ 2 Samuel 13

One day he called for me, saying he was sick. When I came to visit him, Amnon said to me, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple cakes in my sight that I may eat from her hand." I was being deceived by my own son, just like I had deceived my friend Uriah. I had no idea what Amnon had in mind. I never would've sent my daughter into that! Blindly, I called for Tamar and told her to go to her brother Amnon's house and prepare food for him. And she went—my beautiful, innocent daughter. She went and baked some cakes in Amnon's sight.

How terrifying it must've been for her when he grabbed hold of her and wouldn't let go. And then the unspeakable happened. To this day, I shudder in horror and get violently sick to my stomach just to imagine it. I cannot think of Amnon's sin without being haunted by my own.

Soon it was all over, just as violently as it started. Amnon now hated my daughter with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.³⁰ He cast her out of his presence and Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe she was wearing. She went away, crying aloud as she went. And who do you know met her on that journey but Absalom, her brother—my son. Instantly, intuitively, he knew what had happened. He said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you?" From that moment on, Tamar lived as a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house.

When I heard of all these things, I was outraged but I did nothing. I said nothing. All the while, I studiously ignored an active volcano gathering steam in my own family.

Then my third son, Absalom, was my indignant son. Absalom wasn't saying anything either. He would not talk to his brother, Amnon. No harsh words. No kind words. No small talk. Nothing. For Absalom hated Amnon for what he had done to his sister. I knew it and I did nothing at all to address it. If ever he tried to talk to me, I ignored it. And I would not say a word to him about it. Why?

Was I paralyzed by my own shame? Was I afraid that Amnon would scorn me for my own sins? I do not know what kept me from performing my duty as a king and as a father, but my failure to confront and punish my son's wickedness cost a severe

³⁰ 2 Samuel 13:15

price. For two full years, Absalom's rage was simmering. I was too absorbed in my own anger to notice and I foolishly gave in to him when he asked for his brother Amnon to go with him on a sheep shearing expedition. That's when I lost not just one more son, but two.

Amnon, still a lover of himself, got drunk with wine and then Absalom commanded his servants to kill his brother. My failure to execute justice provoked my son to take matters into his own hands. By the time the news of Amnon's death reached my ears, Absalom was long gone. While I was weeping, Absalom was fleeing from my presence. I wept bitterly that night. And for three years, not a day went by when I did not mourn.

My sin had cost me three sons—my infant son is dead, my eldest son is dead, and Absalom has fled. Oh learn this lesson well my friend, **forgiven sins may still sting. Pardoned sins can produce lasting pain. A man reaps what he sows.**

During those three years, my heart would go out to Absalom but I never could bring myself to seek him out. I was not a longing father going out to look for my prodigal son. I was not a good shepherd, going out into the wilderness to search for my lost sheep. I was absorbed in my own sorrow. I had no heart to show my son the same mercy God had shown me.³¹

That's when God sent me a wise woman from Tekoa, with searching words that started to loosen the soil of my sorrow.³² Listen to what she said to me, "*All of us must die eventually. Our lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God does not just sweep life away; instead, he devises ways to bring us back when we have been separated from Him.*"³³

Behold your God! He's a God who devises ways to bring His banished children home, no longer an outcast. He devises ways to bring us back when we have been separated from Him. He is a Father Who runs out to meet His prodigal children. That's our God.

It was time to bring my banished son home—no longer an outcast. But I didn't have it in me yet. Instead, I told my general, Joab, to go get him from Geshur and bring

³¹ Thanks to Dale Ralph Davis for suggesting these thoughts in *2 Samuel: Out of Adversity* (Christian Focus: 2007).

³² 2 Samuel 14

³³ 2 Samuel 14:14 (New Living Translation)

him to Jerusalem but to keep him separated from me, make him dwell in his own house. Don't let him come into my presence. So my son, who had been in hiding for three years, would spend two more years living in the City of David but never seeing my face. My cold-heartedness only fueled his rage. A son cannot live with his back turned to his father. Alienation breeds insubordination and so it did with my son and me.

Absalom kept calling Joab, "Let me into the presence of the king." But Joab would return none of his calls. Finally the boy set my General's field on fire and that got his attention. He told Joab, "I'd rather die than live like this—it's time for the king to see me. It's time for my father to see me and if he finds guilt in me, let him put me to death."

When I heard those words, I realized I had to make the first move. I summoned my son into my royal chamber. I'll never forget what it was like to see him. Five long years had passed. There he was—as strong, as handsome, as courageous as ever. He fell flat on his face in my presence, with his face to the ground and when he bowed there, my heart melted. I could bear it no longer. I stood up from my throne, opened my arms and called out his name. He stood up and I kissed my son. For me, that kiss opened the valve on the container of my anger and quickly it all drained and I was filled with love again. I loved my son again. But for him, too much damage had already been done.³⁴

Before long, I heard that he was out running a public relations campaign, telling the people how much better he was than me. Setting himself up as the perfect candidate for the throne—only the throne was not vacant. My son waged a conspiracy against me, stealing the hearts of all the men of Israel. This went on four years before he asked me if he could go worship the LORD in Hebron. I should've known by then what he was up to.

Before long, a messenger came to me saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." The conspiracy was threatening to become a coup—I could remain in Jerusalem no longer. On my way out of the City of David, all the land wept aloud as all my servants and I passed by. I crossed the brook Kidron and went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as I went, barefoot and with my head covered.

³⁴ 2 Samuel 15

And all the people who were with me covered their heads and they went up, weeping as they went.

One thousand years later, a future Son of mine would follow this same road, would go up on the Mount of Olives and weep and pray. He would cross the brook of Kidron only He would be going in the opposite direction into Jerusalem, weeping not for His sins but for mine and for the sins of all His people.

As I wandered in the wilderness, Absalom was sleeping on the rooftop of my palace where they pitched a tent for him to go in to my concubines in the sight of all Israel just as the prophet Nathan had said.³⁵ Every word of God proves true.

But though God was disciplining me, he also was befriending me. He met me in those days and my heart was filled with praise. As I prayed, I said:

*O LORD, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;
many are saying of my soul,
there is no salvation for him in God. Selah*

*But you, O LORD, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.
I cried aloud to the LORD,
and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah*

*I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.
I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.*

*Arise, O LORD!
Save me, O my God!
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.*

*Salvation belongs to the LORD;
your blessing be on your people! Selah³⁶*

I wrote that when I was fleeing from my son. God was faithful. He shielded me. He restored my glory. He lifted up my head. He delivered me from my enemies.³⁷

³⁵ 2 Samuel 12:11

³⁶ Psalm 3

³⁷ 2 Samuel 22:1, 49; Psalm 18:46-50; Psalm 143:9-12

When I sent my troops into the forest of Ephraim to do battle with the rebels, the last word I spoke to them was about my son: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom."³⁸ I knew they heard me but I didn't know if they would listen. All the while, as my men were out to battle, all I could think about was my boy. Though he had become my enemy, I loved him so dearly.

How can I describe the choking anguish that flooded my soul when they told me he was dead? Years of hard-hearted rejection in myself gave way to heartbreaking lament. I was beside myself in grief so much so that I can barely contain even now.

*"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!
Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"³⁹*

My grief made it a sad triumph for my soldiers. As their king, I should've rejoiced. I should have celebrated their victory over a wicked rebel who had set himself up against God's Kingdom and had been destroyed. The demands of justice were meted out and God's Kingdom has triumphed.

In that sense, Joab was absolutely right when he rebuked me⁴⁰ for mourning when the men of Israel had risked their lives to save my kingdom. What was wrong with me? Did I hate those who loved me and loved those who hated me? Today was a day of victory. Today was a great triumph. Justice had been served. And yet for me, my greatest triumph was also my most tragic loss. Though it is good news for a king when a rebel is destroyed, can it ever be good news for a father when his son dies?

What a terrible price! In order for my enemies to be destroyed, my son had to die. "The demands of justice could only be satisfied through the shattered longings of a father's love."⁴¹

I've lost three sons now. An infant. A first-born. And a rebel. It all can be traced back to a moment in time when I said YES to my lusts when I should've said NO.

³⁸ 2 Samuel 18:5

³⁹ 2 Samuel 18:33

⁴⁰ 2 Samuel 19:1-8

⁴¹ The thoughts in the last four paragraphs were inspired by Christopher Ash's article, "The Death of Absalom: Drama & Theology," at <http://beginningwithmoses.org/bt-briefings/164/the-death-of-absalom-drama-theology>

I'm forgiven. I enjoy fellowship with my God **but forgiven sins can still sting.**

Pardoned sins can cause lasting pain.

You may wonder if I'm bitter. I assure I am not bitter but I am broken. In this life, brokenness is a blessing. I do not despise the discipline of my God.⁴² No, I desire it. I embrace it. I need it. For as I said long ago as a shepherd boy, *"His rod and His staff, they comfort me."*⁴³ It comforts me to know that He cares enough about me to not let me stay in my sins. It comforts me to know that when I have sinned, He longs to not just forgive the guilt of my sin but to remove the cause of my sin so I can share in His holiness.

Friends, "the consequences are not a contradiction of His love. No, they are an expression of His love."⁴⁴ They are there to make you hate the sins that would destroy you.

You've heard my story. Now what about you? How are you being reckless in the face of sin's consequences? Where are you planting seeds right now that will reap a bitter harvest down the road? Are you falling asleep in sin's wretchedness? Are you tempted to say, "It's no big deal; God will forgive me"? Ah yes, He stands ready to forgive, but remember, **forgiven sins may still sting. Pardoned sins can cause lasting pain.**

*"Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. And do not be weary when you are reprovved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."*⁴⁵

Hear this, my friends! Sin is never your friend. Sin is always your enemy.⁴⁶ Never take it lightly. Confess your sins to the Lord right now if there is any area of your life where you are trivializing something God takes with deadly seriousness. Repent. Run into the arms of a merciful God. A God who gave His only Son to die so that both the demands of justice and the loving longings of His Fatherly heart could be fully satisfied.

⁴² Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12

⁴³ Psalm 23:4

⁴⁴ Paul Tripp

⁴⁵ Hebrews 12:5b-6, 11

⁴⁶ Adapted from Paul Tripp.

Someone has wisely said, "The story of Absalom's death ends at the Cross of Jesus Christ. There is a Savior, who because he has dealt with sin can deal gently with sinners. A Savior whose Father longs to be Father to you and to me."⁴⁷ Come to Jesus and live!

In the silence of this moment, I invite you to do business with God. If you're being reckless in any way in the face of sins' consequences, I call on you in the name of Jesus Christ to confess, to repent, to make no excuses, to rationalize nothing away. "You are the man!" He is calling you now to leave your sin; to run to Him. Would you come now?

Father, have mercy on us according to Your steadfast love. Thank You that You do not leave us in our sins but You are intent on destroying the very sin that would destroy us. We trust You, Father, and we ask You to be active in our lives—correcting, admonishing, disciplining. We pray for grace to receive it as an expression of Your love. We thank You for a Savior—Your only Son—Whom You freely gave to die in our place. Thank You that He dealt with our sins so He can now deal gently with us sinners. We flee to Him and we say in light of His dying love, "Take my life Lord, all of me. Here I am Lord, let me be consecrated to You."

"Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to Thee...

Here am I, all of me.
Take my life, it's all for Thee."⁴⁸

New Covenant Bible Church

[4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175](http://www.newcbc.org)

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net

⁴⁷ Christopher Ash

⁴⁸ Here I Am by Frances R. Havergal; updated by Chris Tomlin