

The Worst Day Ever: David – when you are betrayed by someone close to you¹

12th Sunday after Pentecost,
August 23, 2009

We're continuing in our series, The Worst Day Ever, by taking a look at King David this morning. Our Old Testament reading that Cory read for us was taken from a number of selected verses in 2nd Samuel chapters 15 and 18. And, by the way, didn't she do great pronouncing all those Hebrew names!?

I invite you to open your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 18. 2nd Samuel is the 10th book in the Old Testament, so the order goes, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy – the Torah, also known as the Pentateuch, that covers everything from Day One of creation to the month just before the Israelites walked into the Promised Land; the next set of books are referred to as "History" and they cover the time period from the entrance into the promised land all the way up to the establishment of a Monarchy in Israel and the eventual split of the kingdom and exiles. These books are Joshua – the taking of the Promised Land, Judges – the early days of the newly formed people of Israel in their inheritance promised to them by God and how they kept falling away from YHWH, crying out to Him for help, receiving it, and then falling away again; Ruth – a quasi side-story that takes place during the period of the Judges about a foreigner who comes to worship YHWH, and is the Great-Grandmother of David, and thus an ancestor of Jesus; and then comes 1st and 2nd Samuel, which tell us about God establishing the monarchy and Kingdom of Israel under Kings Saul, David and Solomon. Again, we are going to 2nd Samuel, chapter 18.

As we always do, let's set the context for this chapter and the reading Cory did for us this morning.

David was made King in Israel after the previous King, Saul, turned away from God and eventually took his own life. David's reign had been, for the most part, pretty good, right up until the time he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then had her husband killed, and then married her to cover up their pregnancy.

God punished David for this, and Nathan, God's prophet, told David point blank, "Because you have done this, the sword will never depart from your house." In other words, David and Bathsheba (not to mention his other wives) would never be Ward and June Cleaver with Wally and The Beav as their kids.

A lot of things transpire in chapters 13 through 15, but suffice it to say there was a rape of one of David's daughters by her half brother, the murder of that half brother by the daughter's full brother, and an escape into exile by David's son, Absalom, who killed his half brother. In our

¹ Adapted from a sermon by Dr. Mickey Anders

reading today, Absalom is back in town, and is trying to stage a coup to throw David out and take over the kingdom. David has given orders to his troops not to kill Absalom, but the troops didn't listen, and when they found Absalom, they did indeed kill him.

It was one of the worst days of David's life: he almost lost the kingdom to someone who wanted to kill him, and that someone turned out to be his son; the men under David's command didn't listen to him, and violated his direct order; and David's oldest son was killed in the war he started against David. What's worse, and we really don't see this unless we go waaaay back and start reading through chapter 13, David could have stopped all this from happening if he just would have stood up and been the father to his daughter and two sons that he should have, and even more, if he would have resisted his temptation and left Bathsheba alone many years prior to this. The guilt and shame weighed heavily on him, along with the gut-wrenching loss of his child – “If only I had died instead of you!” he cries out.

Been there? I'm not talking about the loss of someone you love, though that's a 'worst day' for many. I'm talking about being betrayed by someone you trusted, someone you loved. They said they wouldn't hurt you, and they did. They said you could trust them, and you found out you couldn't. “Happily ever after” became “good while it lasted.”

This is what we are talking about today in our “Worst Day Ever” series – when you've been betrayed by someone close to you. Many have been there at various levels, but what about God? Let's start there first before we go on to what we can learn from David's experience, and we'll start with a question: “Was it right for David to act the way he did when he found out Absalom had been killed?”

Let's take one more look at the context in light of this question. At first, we might say, “Of course it was right for David to act that way – his son had just been killed.” And though that's true and right and I would probably have done the same thing, let's step back for just one moment. David was caught between two roles: the role of being a father and the role of being a king.

He was the commander in chief for the entire Israelite army who remained true to him and to God. He was the leader for the entire nation. Strip away Absalom's relationship to David as his son, and we're left with nothing but a murderous traitor. He raised an army, attempted a coup, and caused the death of several of his own countrymen. When he was captured justice had to be paid, and the payment for being a traitor is death. Joab knew that, and he also knew that as long as Absalom was alive there would always be a risk of another attempted coup and more death and destruction.

David was caught between his love for his son as a father, and the role of himself as the king, and in verse 33 we see that the role of 'father' won out over the role of king.

Now, here's the question as it relates to God: Which was right? Was it right to execute the demands of justice and see that traitor received the death penalty he deserved? Or was it right for the loving father to forgive this son even though he had long ago passed any reasonable stretch of a father's patience? Because here's the first point: Absalom's rebellion and betrayal is, in a way, our story as well. We are the rebellious children of a heavenly Father.

You can write Romans 3:10-12 and verse 23 in the margins of your Bibles next to these verses: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The Bible makes it very clear that we are all sinners; we are all rebellious children. There really isn't much difference between us and Absalom: Absalom turned against his loving, earthly father. In our sin, we are acting in rebellion against our loving Heavenly Father.

And what does justice demand? Romans 5:8 says "For the wages of sin is death..." We deserve the penalty of death, of eternal death, because of our sin, because of our rebellion against God. That is the demand of justice!

But, here's the good news – 1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

God loves us more than David could ever love his son. God's compassion and grief for us multiplies a thousand times those words of David, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Did you catch that phrase, "Would I had died instead of you"? And He did. Jesus died instead of us. Our rebellious natures, our sinful selves, had to – still have to – be dealt with, and Jesus did it for us when He experienced literal hell on the cross for us when He called out, "My God, My God! Why have You forsaken Me?" He experienced it, so we would never have to, and He experienced it because of the love of God the Father, and the justice of God the King. Justice was met, and love was proclaimed in that literal hellish time on the cross for you and me and all who confess, repent and believe in Jesus.

Now, let's take a look at David's worst day ever and see what we can apply to ourselves when the demands for justice and love both ring in our ears when we experience any sort of betrayal on one of our worst days ever.

Would you please write in your margins "Psalm 3"? Psalm 3 is the Psalm David wrote while all this was going on – while Absalom was trying to kill him and take over the kingdom. Listen to what this man, who in the middle of being betrayed, said:

O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." But You are a shield around me, O LORD; You bestow glory on me and

lift up my head. To The LORD I cry aloud, and He answers me from His holy hill. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because The LORD sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. From The LORD comes deliverance. May Your blessing be on your people.

First, we don't sugar-coat what's happened. Call the thing what it is! The technical term for this is "The Theology of the Cross." There's a little more to The Theology of the Cross than just being honest about what's really going on, but this is a start. No excuses, no trying to walk a middle line or make excuses for others.

The reason for this is because in order for healing from a betrayal to happen, we have to be honest about what was done to us, even if the person who hurt us is someone we love dearly.

Second, we need to do what this whole Psalm is doing – going to God. Let's face it, none of us can control anything or anyone when you get right down to it. But God is in control of everything. Note how David prayed on this worst day of his life, and the three things we can remember in our prayers in times of betrayal:

1. He asked God to *do something!* "Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God!" On our worst days ever, we need to acknowledge our complete dependence on God. We don't do this for God's sake (He already knows He's in charge!). We do it for our sake, to remind ourselves that we are not calling the shots and need the hand of our Father to take over.
2. He asked God for help – *Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.* Pretty strong language, especially considering his enemy was his oldest son, but it shows us how to pray when we are experiencing a betrayal, especially if that betrayal has ramifications that keep going on and on. We pray for God to put an end to what's happening. "Stop the person or the persons that are hurting me. Stop their actions against me. Bring this all to an end, and let the truth be known."
3. We'll go a step further though, and after that add one more thing to our prayer regarding the person or persons – we pray for them to have a changed heart and be restored to the right relationship with Jesus that *He* wants them to have. Let's be honest – some relationships this side of heaven between people may never be restored after a hurtful situation, but even though we pray that they be stopped in what they are doing, we also pray for their salvation. We pray the Holy Spirit touches their hearts and changes them.

You know the interesting thing about this third step? When we pray that for those who have hurt us, we are changed. Our hearts begin to heal, and forgiveness becomes more and more possible.

Finally, on the worst days ever, remember something very, very important – we are never alone: *You are a shield around me, O LORD; You bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To The LORD I cry aloud, and He answers me from His holy hill. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because The LORD sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.*

Even in the darkest of times, during those long days and even longer nights, we are not alone. Our God is with us and will NOT leave us. Take comfort in that today, tomorrow and on all the “worst days ever.” It’s a promise from our God to you and me, and God never breaks a promise or changes His mind about what He said. He is the rock-steady, never changing God, and that is something we can always count on.

Would you pray with me please?

Lord Jesus, thank You for promising to never leave us, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in. Thank You for your promise that even though others may betray our trust, You will not – Your word stands firm yesterday, today and forever, You do not change.

It’s hard, Jesus, when we find ourselves in situations like David and someone we’ve trusted is betraying that trust and gathering others to work against us. It’s hard to think that we’ve done that to You, too, through our sinful rebellion.

Forgive us. Help us to always turn to You, to trust You, and to always be in Your Word and in prayer; prayer not only for Your help for us, but also for those who are hurting us – that they stop, and that they are changed.

We lift ourselves and them up to You, and ask it in Your name, Amen.