



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Lessons from the Life of David

2 Samuel 2:18

“Delivering Mercy and Unreasonable Grief”

TRANSCRIPT

We're turning to 2 Samuel chapter 18 for the continuation of our studies in the Life of David. The topic for today is slightly different from that listed in the calendar. I must have given to Miss Ray the wrong title. But it is not “Delivering Mercy and Unmerciful Grief” but “Delivering Mercy and Unreasonable Grief.” And, I think, that will make more sense as we read through this chapter. But we are reading the entire chapter of 33 verses. And remember the context, David has been forced out of Jerusalem. Absalom has raised a rebellion against him. And now, as a result of the counsel of Hushai being accepted rather than the counsel of Ahithophel, David is given a respite of delay and he has made his way on across the Jordan River. And there has had at least time to organize his somewhat confused resources. And so the chapter now will describe the battle that will eventually take place and, ultimately, the death of Absalom. And we read in verse 1.

“And David numbered the people who were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. 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.’ 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.’ 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.

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. So the people went out into the field of battle against Israel, and the battle was in the woods of Ephraim. The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David and a great slaughter of twenty thousand took place that day; 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. Then Absalom met the servants of David. [And this is obviously intended to be a chance or accidental encounter.] Absalom rode on a mule. [It was, incidentally, customary for kings to ride on mules. But Absalom is one who we’ve already seen liked to have a chariot and horses accompanying him. But here, he’s riding 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.

Now, a certain man saw it and told Joab, and said, ‘I just saw Absalom hanging in a terebinth tree!’ 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.’ And 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!’”

Incidentally, in the Hebrew text is much more vivid. He says something like, “And know I with a thousand of silver” and shekels is said here, “A thousand of silver in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king and his son.” Verse 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.’ [Now, here is a man of principle, but also a very wise man as well.] Then Joab said, ‘I cannot linger with you.’”

This is conversation like the man who’s discussing theology with someone and you have made a point that overthrows his viewpoint entirely and he says, “Well, I’d better go. I don’t have time to discuss that further.” And, evidently, Joab had a similar attitude when he 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. And ten young men who bore Joab’s armor surrounded Absalom, and struck and killed him. [In other words, they finished the job.] So Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing Israel. For Joab held back the people. [He’s an extremely wise man and in order to preserve Israel as a whole, he stops the slaughter, reminiscent of something that’s happened recently.] 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. [And, of course, when they say “all Israel fled” this means those that were fighting David and his servants. So they fled and went to their homes.] 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.’”

And, incidentally, if you read through and pondered as you went along, you'll remember the text of Scriptures does say Absalom had sons and also a daughter. So students of the accounts have come to the conclusion that his sons had lost their lives earlier.

“He called the pillar after his own name. And to this day it is called Absalom's Monument. 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.’ 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.’”

Now, that was wise because evidently he suspected that if David heard that news, he might turn on the individual who brought the bad news, as he had done once before and kill Ahimaaz. And so he rather prefers a Cushite, an Ethiopian to do the job.

“Then Joab said to the Cushite, ‘Go, tell the king what you have seen.’ So the Cushite bowed himself to Joab and ran. 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?’ ‘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.”

Knowing the territory, evidently, a little better, he took a route that was much easier for him. The Cushite, not knowing the place, had to run through the crevices and the bushes and the thickets that had entangled Absalom. And so, consequently, Ahimaaz outran him.

“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. 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. 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.” 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.’ So 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!’ 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.’ [A good example of an evasive reply and maybe also a health protecting reply.] And the king said, ‘Turn aside and stand still.’ So he turned aside and stood still.

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.’ 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!’ Then the king was deeply moved, [This Hebrew word is a word that means “trembled” and so, it’s almost as if he shuddered and trembled over the news and began to make his way up the steps.] into to the chamber over the gate, and weeping along the way. And as he went, he said thus, ‘O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!’”

Now, we won’t have time to make a point over that last statement of David’s. Obviously from my title you’ll understand that while David was very concerned over the

death of Absalom, I suggest to you that it was unreasonable grief. And it was unreasonable grief because it's the grief of a man who has not done, either by life or else in his family, what he should have done for his son Absalom. And so his grief is a kind of grief, while it is deep, it really is unreasonable. And not that he should not have grieved over the loss of his son, but the depth of it is a cover of the mistakes that King David has made.

May the Lord help us to learn from it and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the lessons that we have from the word of God. We thank Thee that the time the things that were written aforetime were written for our learning that we, through the comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. We thank Thee that these great events of the Old Testament were designed not only for those who first read them or composed them, but for us down through the centuries since, who have had the inspired Scriptures to give to us an indication of Thy perfect mind for men and women. We thank Thee for Thy word, Lord, and today we give Thee thanks for this account and for others contained in this marvelous inspired book.

We ask Thy blessing upon our country and upon our President. We particularly pray for our president and ask that Thou wilt minister to him and to his personal bodily health. Give wisdom and guidance to him in the decisions that he must make as our political leader.

We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ and ask Thy blessing upon all of those who belong to Him whom to know is life eternal. And, whether young little children or whether young people or adults, O God, today, strengthen the saints and build them up in the faith and help them to have the kinds of priorities in their lives that will, most effectively, glorify Thy name.

We pray for Believers Chapel. We ask Thy blessing upon this church, upon its members and friends and the visitors who are here today. May we all together grow in the knowledge of our Lord and be better prepared for the life that Thou hast given us to life.

We pray for the sick, for those who are struggling with physical difficulties and trials and some who have very, very difficult situations in their bodies, we ask, O God, to give wisdom and direction to those who minister to them. And if it please Thee, give healing. We commit them to Thee. We thank Thee for the faith that they have manifested in requesting our prayers and we pray for each one of them and for others of our friends who need ministry from Thee.

We pray, now, Lord, as we sing, as we listen to the word of God, that we may be strengthened for this day and for the days of this week.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Whenever I sing that hymn written by William Cowper, I reflect upon the fact that it reflects his own life because when he speaks about “his frame being calm and serene,” that was the great problem of Cowper's life. The difficulty he had in having inner calm and inner serenity. But he was a great man of God and wrote some marvelous poetry as well as hymns which, I guess, illustrates the fact that all of us, generally, within the Christian family, we each have our own particular trials that we have to undergo as well.

Well, our subject today is “Delivering Mercy and Unreasonable Grief.” After his great sin, David's life, as we've been suggesting, has gone down hill. There is no question about the covenantal promises. David is still the anointed king. God has not withdrawn from him his favored place as Israel's covenanted king. But disciplinary judgment has begun to take hold of his life, and it's rather sad to think of a man now in his seventies having to suffer the disciplinary judgment that David does, after having been

such a fruitful young man and also a man of middle ages. But now, as Nathan had warned him after his adultery, “The sword shall never depart from your house because you have despised Me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.” So David suffers the disciplinary judgment of failure within his own believing life.

The rebellion of Absalom, his son, is one of the deepest of the disciplinary judgments that David must undergo and it forces him to face some trying dilemmas. First of all, the clash between fatherhood, the fatherhood of a straying son, and the royal office of a king. To put it in abstract terms, it's emotion wrestling with duty.

It's remarkable, isn't it? The space given to the life of Absalom. In fact, one gets the impression from reading this chapter that it's not so much the battle by which David is restored to his throne that's important, but it's the story of Absalom and his failure and his death. And yet, the other event seems so much more important at first glance. For David to be king again surely has the greatest of significance for the people of Israel. And when I see something like this, the natural indication that it makes with reference to me, in my study of Scriptures, is simply this, why is so much space devoted to the life of Absalom? And if you'll look at the life of Absalom, I won't go into the details and the steps of it, you have all of the stages of the life that any one of us might have lived.

He began as the son of the king. As a matter of fact, his mother was the daughter of a king, and, thus, he had royal blood, so to speak. A man of great blessing, physically; he had all the physical appearances that would mark him out as an unusual individual, the kind of person that you would look at and perhaps be attracted to. And if you were not attracted to him you would admire him and admire the things that God had given him. And then as you follow Absalom, you will notice the stages of his destruction in his spiritual existence. There is the backsliding, the perversion of his gifts, his beauty, his eloquence, his scheming. All the faculties of his nature which he had in strength are now diverted to things that do not glorify the Lord God or his word.

Fundamentally, what develops is the resolution of his will to get rid of authority over him; the authority specifically of David, his father. And these early feelings, no doubt, of disobedience to his parent were ultimately the thing that brought his downfall. What he was interested in it seems is dislodging God from his conscience because his conscience would have told him he should obey his father and do what his father wished him to do. And so it almost seems as if everything in Absalom's life is an attempt to avoid the obedience that he owed to his father and the obedience, therefore, that he owed to God. And so, if he can dislodge his father and God, himself, from his conscience, then he can do what he wishes. Someone has said, “The alienated become as gods, knowing good and evil.” And Absalom seems to be following in that path.

And one of the things that impresses you as you read the story of the Absalom is the fact that these valuable gifts that one possess which he does not use as he should are sometimes the things that hasten the destruction of the individual. Absalom's pride, his hair made him so conspicuous, but they seem to combine for his fall. While it's not specifically stated that the hair is the reason for him being caught in between the boughs of the tree, the impression you get is as you read the account that that was something of the problem; perhaps a means of holding him there.

But, at any rate, the important thing is that God, as someone has said, “has many branches that stretch out for his rebels.” And the least likely things are often the things that deter the individual who thinks maybe he can get away from obedience to the word of God and to the Lord God himself. And Absalom's memory is destined to be that of a dishonorable person and how mortifying it must have been for him, if he realized it, that he would be cut down from the tree like a common felon and buried like a dog. The Scriptures say, “The wicked are cut off.” They're memorial perishes. And they also say, “The wicked shall go into outer darkness.” And Absalom is an illustration of some of these great truths.

Now, there is one other dilemma that is here, but we won't lay any stress on it at the point. It's simply the dilemma of Joab, a loyal general, but a loyal general for complex reasons and some of them, obviously, not good. He is the cold, relentless, almost autonomous subject of David. And one gains the impression that Joab is really the one who is determining the things that are happening. And so that too is another dilemma that the great king faces.

I love this little incident that we read about the certain man who had the discussion with Joab because that little discussion between that certain man, who's not given a name and Joab illustrates the proper principles of conduct. And we'll lay a little stress on it when we come to it.

But first of all, we'll just recount some of the details of the crushing of the rebellion. Hushai's counsel has prevailed and when Ahithophel heard Hushai present the counsel of gathering all of Israel in a massive army and attacking David, there came upon him a Maalox moment, as we suggested. [Laughter] And he realized that if they did select the counsel of Hushai that all was over for him, because he saw that the only way to defeat David was to defeat him by surprising him. And they had surprised him and he was disorganized and retreating and that was their time to attack. And to kill David, that was the key. And when he lost that, Hushai's plan went into effect. And now, all Israel is gathered against David.

The preparation that King David makes is the preparation of a skillful general. It's very common for armies to be organized into three parts; and that's what he did. David and two of his nephews and then Ittai the Gittite, a foreigner, and so, we have three divisions. One under Joab, one under Abashai, and one under Ittai the Gittite; that, in itself, was wise because the natives were under the two native Israelites, Abashai and Joab, and the foreigners were under Ittai the Gittite. But David was over them all.

Now, David is rejected as the personal leader; not simply because it's painful to battle his son, but they knew that there would be, as Ahithophel suggested, a concerted

attempt to kill David. And notice what they say about David. They say, “You are worth ten thousand of us now, for you are now more help to us in the city.” We live in the day in which it is thought that “all men are equal” and we cite often the statement “All men are created equal.” Scripture, however, suggests there are important differences between us and these individuals express it as well. “Thou art worth ten thousand of us.” The doctrine that “All men are equal” is true in some important respects, but its application and its use are very limited. It’s equally true that all men are unequal; that no man or woman is of exactly the same weight and worth as any other man. Men differ infinitely in body and mind, in the characteristics that we have, in the things that have been given to us by creation. It’s foolish for us to think that we all are the same, equal in the fullest sense. We differ infinitely.

But we also are responsible in accordance with our capacities. And so those of us who are more equal than some of the others have more responsibility. And it’s well for us to remember that. And I’m using “us” purely in the sense of one of us in this room. I think, incidentally, that those who are the greatest among us often realize that they are the ones who have the greatest need.

But, at any rate, the battle preparations are made. And then in verse 6 through verse 8, we read of the battle. And it’s a very difficult battle for Absalom and all Israel. David is very intelligent as a general, with great experience, and the men with him are experienced. And so they have chosen the battlefield. The terrain is filled with wooden thickets, it’s filled with crevices and places in which men might fall into deep holes, and that would be very bad for inexperienced people. And, further, others who did not even know the territory and many of all Israel did not.

The experienced warriors obviously have the advantage and David has the experienced warriors and so the effects of the landscape as well as the experience of David’s men leads to great loss of life, not only from the fact that they were more skillful warriors but the country was strange to them. And since they didn’t know the country

they tended to wander about aimlessly in it and get lost and when they did that, then of course they were attacked by hunger. And as a matter of fact, the Scripture says, in verse 8, “The woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.” It was kind of like a Persian Gulf campaign, from the reading of this. It was very quick. David and his men acted with the celerity of the forces of the Coalition. Or, if you want to forget about the Persian Gulf for awhile, like the celerity of Alexander and his forces in the conquering of their world. That was the thing that characterized Alexander. It’s reflected, also, in the word of God; in that the Grecian forces under Alexander the Great are likened to a leopard, an animal known for its celerity; and then, also, likened to the he-goat, in the ferociousness of attack. If you look at Alexander and study his campaigns and study his men, you’ll see that he conquered mainly by being able to quickly attack and overcome the forces that were arrayed against him.

And then, for those of us who are Southerners, those Yankees in the audience you can drift off for a moment, this reminds us of our great general, Stonewall Jackson, in the Valley campaign in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in which that was the characteristic of Jackson’s victories. The celerity with which he carried on his campaign and the important victories were gained because most of the time the forces arrayed against him were surprised and unprepared for attack. Well, that evidently is what happened. It’s not surprising that David and his men should win the battle.

But now, the author goes on to describe the slaying of Absalom. And this, to him, at least it seems as I read this chapter, is more important than the battle itself. And so, we have Absalom’s accident in verse 9. “Then Absalom met the servants of David.” Evidently, he was riding around on his mule and did not know where they were, and came upon them suddenly.

I read a week or so ago a story that happened during the War in the Pacific, Second World War, a young Yank pilot landed his airplane on an aircraft carrier, dashed up to the bridge with his information to give to his commander, and as he was pulling off

his life jacket and running, he recounted his day's work, not having taken care to look carefully at the man on the bridge to whom he was reporting. He said, “What a day I had, Skipper, sunk a Jap cruiser, shot down 7 Jap planes and left a Jap battleship listing.” As he finished pulling off his life jacket up over his eyes, he heard, “Very good, Yank! But you make one very bad mistake!” [Laughter]

Well, Absalom made one very bad mistake, riding his mule, he rode it into the servants of David. And the mule, in the attempt to escape, went under some thick boughs of a terebinth tree, and Absalom's head was caught in the fork of the branches of the tree. And the mule went on, and he was left hanging in the tree.

Now, I don't know, of course, not having been there, I don't know exactly how this happened. But there is one explanation that may be fairly accurate. One of the scholars has suggested that Absalom was caught by the neck in the fork of two boughs which had been kept low down and held together by the surrounding branches. Jolted by the impact of Absalom's weight, the fork became dislodged and the two arms closed around Absalom's neck as they sprang upward, freed from the entangling branches, and carrying him with them. And, perhaps, that is something like what happened.

At any rate, there he is, hanging under the tree. And a certain man saw it. Now, this is the interesting man, and to my mind, he's almost the most interesting man of this chapter, and he's not even named.

“Now a certain man saw it and went over and told Joab, and said, “I just saw Absalom hanging in a terebinth tree!” Now, Absalom asks him, “You just saw him! Why didn't you strike him there to the ground? I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a belt.” Now, this is a classic confrontation. It's a confrontation between a man of principle and a man of rebellious expediency. And the sophisticated expediency of the man of the world, triumphs as so often, unfortunately. Or at least, it appears to do so. Not in God's eyes; and not in God's world. But it appears to us often that the man of

sophisticated expediency is the intelligent individual. This man is horrified at Absalom’s disobedience, suggesting that he should slay Absalom.

Why, he said, “If I had a thousand shekels of silver in my hand, I wouldn’t raise my hand against the king’s son.” He’s told us not to do that! And you were there. All of us were there when we heard it. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, ‘Beware lest anyone touch the young man Absalom!’ It’s plain and clear. It’s obedience to the supreme authority. And then he goes on to say, “Otherwise I would have dealt falsely against my own life.” I would be disobedient to the king. And there’s nothing hidden from the king. He would find out about it. And then, he adds, wisely, “And you yourself would have set yourself against me.” He knows Joab well enough to know that Joab would have thought, “This is the ideal thing. He has slain Absalom. I’ll slay him. And David will be happy over the fact that I’ve slain him because he slew Absalom.” And that’s what he would like for him to do. And he offered him money to do it.

But principle was more important for the certain man. I don’t know his name. I look forward to seeing him in heaven. But he’s one of the men that stands out in the section as a man of principle, of obedience. Something that Absalom was not.

I say, this is a classic confrontation and really it would be worth a lengthy exposition of what lies behind it all. Among the things that are, if I may put it in simple words are, life in different kinds of men is conducted on different and totally irreconcilable principles. There are primary principles in our lives. There is the primary principle in government; obedience to the higher authority. The law of the ruler is supreme. There are principles within the family; the expressed will of the father is binding. In matters of spirituality and religion; the will of God, as expressed in his word, is primary. The fundamental principles of life call upon men to repent, to believe in the promised redeemer now, we know him as Jesus of Nazareth, to believe in him and to, by

God's grace and the power he affords through the Holy Spirit, to have our lives conform to the teaching of Holy Scripture.

But there are men in our society and also in the church who do not operate upon these principles. They are men like Joab. They break the law of the land. They set aside supreme authority for reasons of their own. There are children who violate the fundamental principles of domestic order. They believe that their judgment is wiser than the judgment of their parents and so they disobey their parents. There are men of the world who have the nerve and have the determination to disobey the will of the eternal Father in Heaven and pay no attention to the command that we repent and believe in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and receive from him the gift of eternal life. And these men are disobedient to their parents, they are disobedient to authority, they disobey our Lord, and represent an illustration of expediency overcoming principle.

Conduct based on the recognition of first principles is, I think, as this story indicates, more likely to characterize unsophisticated men. If you look at these two men; Joab is a sophisticated man. He's a man of the world. He's had great experiences. He's in the highest echelons of power and authority, but it's he that's the man of expediency. However, this other individual, whose name we don't even know, this "a certain man" is obviously very unsophisticated. One can see that from the things that he says to Joab. But he is the individual who follows the principles that are most conformable to the word of God. And I think you will find in the affairs of our country and the affairs of the church, numerous illustrations of this. In other words, if I may say without being personally attacking our present Secretary of State, but it is characteristic of men in authority to be men of expediency, some more, some less, but almost all diplomats of expediency. You rarely ever find an unsophisticated man in a high position in diplomacy. They are skilled in the principles of expediency and making them sound as the most acceptable path to follow.

If one turns to Matthew chapter 6 and reads Matthew chapter 6 carefully, in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount and the way in which he speaks of the life of the individual, you'll see that unsophisticated obedience of the word of God that characterizes the simple man.

Another thing, you'll notice also that often circumstances arise that indicate that it would be the thing to do to deviate from the principles. The circumstances seem to favor it. One can even call upon providence, as if providence is that which enables us at times to be disobedient to the word of God. Just think from Joab's standpoint. Absalom deserved death, did he not? Well, of course he did. He was a murderer. And, furthermore, he's a rebel against authority. Surely he deserved death. And so here he's in the hands of Joab, providentially, he might say the Lord has put him in our hands and we ought to take advantage of it.

And, furthermore, there were other things that might suggest it as well. He's running away, and various other things might be suggested. But, it's not necessary to go into them. I'm sure you realize that these arguments of spiritual truths are simply ways by which the commandments of the Lord God, as the Lord Jesus said, “are made of non-effect.”

So Joab by what he has done, sows the seeds of rebellion in the authority of King David's rule over the land. He sets aside the supreme law. He sets aside the law of God and the force of law itself. What an interesting little three or four verses there around which so much significant truth is built.

Well, the burial of Absalom is described in verses 16 through 18. Joab is a brutal man, but Joab is a very statesman-like man and so he must bury Absalom. And they take Absalom and cast him into a large pit in the woods and they laid a very large heap of stones over him and then all Israel went home. “And Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up a pillar for himself, which is in the King's Valley.” And he called the pillar after his own name. “And to this day it is called Absalom's Monument.” Absalom had

already made plans. He was foreseeing enough to make plans for the time when he would die, not having sons, and so to have a memorial built, The Monument of Absalom, and so God in his sovereign providence and harmony with the will of God makes it to come to pass that Absalom is thrown into a pit and covered with stones, just as if he were a dog. So the individual who plans his great memorial finds out that his memorial is not a pillar for himself, but a large pit in which are stones thrown over his body.

There comes to my mind a text in Isaiah chapter 53, the text of the great suffering servant of Jehovah, and the prophecy that is made with reference to him. In Isaiah chapter 53 in verse 9, we read these words. I'm going to read the text that I have and I'll make just one slight change in it. Verse 9 of Isaiah 53, “And they made His grave with the wicked – But with the rich at His death.” That opening expression “they made” is probably impersonal. It's something like the German expression [German indistinct], and I'm going to translate it, “They appointed.” They appointed his grave with the wicked, it's literally, they gave his grave with the wicked. And then, the next clause, I'm going to translate it this way. “And yet, and yet He was with the rich in His death.” So those who crucified our Lord crucified him as a blasphemer and they wanted to bury him as a blasphemer and that was to be his monument; the monument of the death of a blasphemer. But Joseph of Arimathea came along, a rich man, and asked for the body and Pilate in the providence of God, not because Pilate thought he was doing God's will, but Pilate gave him His body and so he was buried in the tomb of a rich man. And, furthermore, a tomb in which no one had ever been buried; further honor for our Lord. Men appointed his death with the wicked; but God appointed his death to be with the rich and a rich believer in Joseph of Arimathea, a secret believer.

The pathetic grief of David is recorded in the final verses. Augustine once said, “Absalom afflicted his father more by his death than by his life.”

Well, we've read the account of Ahimaaz and the Cushite being sent with the news; and Ahimaaz with further information able to avoid the defiles and the tangles and

the thickets arriving first, giving a favorable report but then evasive about Absalom's death. And the Cushite's good report, it was a gentle report, but then gave the bad news to the king and the king's violent trembling that seized him and he weeps. One gets the impression that David weeps as one whose sin has found him out. “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!”

Now, I know it's possible by contrast to take that text and refer it to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, for in the realities of our Lord's life he did die for sinners. But I'm going to pass that by because that's not, obviously, the point of the statement.

I'd like to mention just finally, David's dilemmas, because they remain. He has not yet handled the positions of king and father well. He's not disciplined Absalom and now, he still suffers the claims of duty and emotions. And they are mixed up. And as a result, his final words express to me the unreasonableness of his grief.

There is a text that pertains to our young people that is so important in our day. One of the characteristics of the last days is that our children shall be disobedient to their parents. Absalom surely illustrates the importance of teaching our young people, our children, their duty of obedience to their parents. And the consequences of Absalom's disobedience are very plain.

Now, after the message this morning, I made that point, tried to make the point, someone came up to me and said, “Well, it's true that we have responsibility but we must not give the impression that if we had carried out our responsibility Absalom would have been saved. He was an individual who was a non-elect person.” And that is true. And I don't want to give that impression. But on the other hand, there is the responsibility that we do have as parents with reference to our children. This text, disobedient to parents, provides an insight into the tragedy of Absalom; at the time a relatively young man, about twenty-seven years of age.

What a striking picture of divine justice and the perversity of the way of Absalom? He was arrested by divine justice in the perversity of his way and, ultimately, met his

death. God put a stop to his flight, ultimately. He was an eager, impetuous, tall young man with long, glorious hair. Something like mine. [Laughter] And he became entangled in the tresses of his hair and fastened by his neck in the forked bough, left hanging between heaven and earth, rejected, it was almost a vivid picture of a traitor to both, traitor to heaven and a traitor to earth. None of his companions in crime remained with him. Everybody left him alone to his fate. “A man whom divine vengeance is pursuing,” someone has said, “does not escape.” And isn’t it interesting? God even controls the trees. The trees that have no feeling such as you and I have, are amenable to the command of the Lord God. And the mule, the dumb animal, also, apparently trivial, but the dumb animal and the trees that have no feeling combine in obedience to the word of God to do His will, with reference to Absalom.

It is certainly true as the proverb says, evil pursues sinners. The Proverbs, incidentally, have a number of texts that bear on that point. We don’t have time to look at them.

One last thing, you notice how David is concerned about Absalom. He said before the battle, “Now deal gently for my sake with the young man, Absalom.” And then, two times more, three times in all, he expresses his concern. When Ahimaaz comes, he says, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” And then again in verse 32, to the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” Great concern. You cannot help but admire him for that. But I’d like to suggest to you that the proper concern of a believing parent is more than physical safety.

On the TV news, then o’clock, occasionally, “Do you know where your child is?” It’s ten o’clock. Oh, how insignificant! How shallow! The big question is, Is your son or daughter safe, not physically, but in the arms of our Lord Jesus Christ, belonging to him? That’s the big question. That’s the fundamental question of life. To bring our children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is the greatest of the commands that God has

put upon us as his believing children. And he offers us his help in doing that as we give ourselves to it.

I suggest to you that David's statement is all right, as long as you add a bit to it. Is the young man Absalom safe in Christ? Safe in Christ? And you know, there are ways in which we can tell, too, parents. If your child has no love for the word of God, he's not safe. If he has no love for the people of God, does not care to meet with the people of God and listen to the word of God, he's not safe. If his companions are the kinds of companions that drag him down and that's the kind of companions that he likes, he's not safe. If he doesn't really care for the things that are found in this great book and for our Lord Jesus Christ, whose the message of the book, he's not safe. And, oh, how important it is that you pray for that son, that he may be brought back to the Lord, that son or daughter.

We have the promises of the word of God that God answers prayer. And so, I suggest to you that that's really the message that comes to us in a most practical way. Those final words, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, if only I had died in your place!” are a kind of shadow of God's great love for us, through Jesus Christ. And it is true that as we look to him in the light of what Christ has accomplished we may expect him to answer our prayers in accordance with his will and to do his perfect will with regard to our children and with regard to other members of our family.

If you are here today and you've never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you again of what Christ has done for sinners; that we are sinners and we need him. Flee to him that you too may be safe in Christ.

Let's stand for the blessing, for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for these magnificent lessons that are found in the word of God. And, O Father, give us the strength and the grace and the determination with Thy help to be obedient to the Scriptures that Thou hast given to us.

Deliver us from carelessness in our Christian life. And Lord, if there should be someone here who does not know our Lord, we know that today is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time. May at this very moment they give thanks to Thee for Christ and his saving work and hide themselves under his arms for eternity.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.