

Not So Happy Ending

A Sermon in the Perfectly Imperfect Series by Pastor Rob Hamilton
Delivered on February 27, 2022

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 NRSV

5 The king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.” And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

6 So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. 7 The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. 8 The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.

9 Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging[a] between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

15 And ten young men, Joab’s armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

1 Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, “Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.” 32 The king said to the Cushite, “Is it well with the young man Absalom?” The Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man.”

33 [a] The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Preamble

Hi! I am Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor and thank you for joining us as we wrap up this series that follows David. All along the way we've been not only learning about the David story but seeing how God works in our lives to bring about God's extraordinary purposes in the world. Today our series ends on a not so happy note for David, but I am optimistic that we will end on a hopeful note for us.

If you are just tuning in and want to see how this series has brought us to this dower ending our worship archive page of genevaumc.org or our YouTube channel to see our past worship services in this series.

I'm going to jump right in today after we pause here for prayer. Please join with me in prayer and pray for me? Thank you.

Prayer of Illumination

God of our ancestors, God of us all,

We seek your presence, comfort and word for our lives today. Send us your Holy Spirit to rest upon our hearts and my lips that through this tragic ending of the story of David we might find your grace for our lives today. Amen.

Sermon

Let me see if I can summarize the David story up to when it goes sideways in 50 words or less. God's people form a nation and want a king. The first king, Saul, wasn't so great. Shepherd boy, David, is anointed King. God is with David as he reaches the throne. David loses sight of God. David throws it all away and sets up his family and kingship for tragedy and hardship. That's 52 words. Yet God, through the David story, have seen has been faithful, present, persistent and forgiving throughout.

Last week, after covering David's assault of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah, we saw how **God forgives our sin to free us from shame so that we can live faithfully even in the midst of the consequences of our sin.**

I want to close out today with the consequence of David's sin and a summary of what transpires in the last 25 years or so of David's life for us to see that even when we've made a mess of our lives, God is with us. **God uses our messy and broken lives for God's purposes in the world.**

Here is what happens after David repents, starting in 2 Samuel 12. The child Bathsheba bore as a result of David's assault dies. David also has a set of older children by his other wives. David's first born is Amnon. Then, by another wife is Absalom. Absalom is David's favored son and David's first daughter Tamar is Absalom's sister and Amnon's half sister.

Amnon, like his father, becomes infatuated with someone he oughtn't and through a bunch of trickery, Amnon sexually assaults his half-sister Tamar. David learns about this violation amongst this children and dismisses the whole incident. This plants the seeds of anger, shame, and revenge in Absalom. Absalom is upset that his father would not do right by his sister or conduct his own home with any sort of righteousness. Absalom spends two years plotting how to make things right. Absalom ends up tricking David into setting up Amnon to be murdered in vengeance of Tamar. This is like a 3000 year old soap opera here. Remember, how the prophet Nathan told David his sins are forgiven, but the consequence of his sin will be upon his house forever? This is what it's like and it keeps going.

Absalom flees after the murder of his half-brother. He spends three years in hiding. David not only grieves the death of Amnon but the estrangement of Absalom. Joab, David's nephew and top General conspires to bring Absalom back from his hide out and eventually David is able to forgive Absalom.

Absalom is a chip off the old block. He's charismatic, handsome, politically savvy. Once forgiven, Absalom begins starts undermining his father and gathering people and favor towards himself ... all under his father's nose. Once Absalom had spent four years building himself up, he decides to start carries out an insurrection that sends old king David and his household to flee Jerusalem for the safety of the wilderness.

David is heartbroken over all of this. He weeps over the loss of his family, his kingship and seems powerless to do anything about all of it. He just wishes he could be in right relationship with Absalom - never mind David has a bunch of other wives and children including Solomon who will be the next major king of Israel. I mean this story has echos of the Prodigal Son story. Absalom didn't squander his inheritance, he took it multiplied and betrayed his father with it. David is left empty handed and longing for his lost son to return even though he has been betrayed.

The whole situation gets worse. Stick with me another 90 seconds and we will take a break from covering all of this consequence of sin covering 6 chapters of 2nd Samuel. Absalom takes Jerusalem for his own. He publicly rapes his father's concubines to shame his father and show dominance over the people. There is going to be some cat and mouse between Absalom's troops and allies and David's troops and allies. In one battle, David's troops will claim victory and while fleeing, Absalom, will get his hair stuck in the crook of a tree. David's troops will slaughter Absalom for the traitor he is despite David's orders to be gentle with Absalom and to bring him home.

When word comes to David that Absalom is dead, David grieves like father who has lost yet another son tragically and not like a king who would be relieved that the insurrection is over and he can reclaim his throne. Joab, David's general is the one that has been doing the hard work to make things right and Joab pushes David past his grief to lead the people again and reclaim the throne. But David is a broken, broken man by this point. But David is able to lead again thanks to a lot of loyal help and Israel will start to prosper, stop the inner quarreling and be ready to face the threat of outside nations again. Which God will be faithful and lead David to victory yet again, despite all the mess and brokenness in David's home.



Now, if you are like me, why is this story -with all its gory details- included in the Bible? Wouldn't some editor want to just skip to the good part?

I wonder if David's story of triumph and tragedy, heartbreak, shame and bloodshed, betrayal, loss, forgiveness and weakness is here for us. It's here to let us know that we need to keep it real?

This story is for us who have messed up families. This story is for those of us who have lost children. This story is for those of us who have been betrayed by those we love or experience violence in our homes. This story is for those who have to flee their country; who have wronged their parents; abused their siblings; chosen political expedience over doing what is right. This story is for those of us who might have it all on the outside but are a wreck on the inside. I wonder if this story remains for all of us who feel shame and deserve it. This story is for those who have it all and it's so fragile and it is for those who have lost it all. This story is for those who have ever experienced estrangement and disappointment and reconciliation.

I think this story persists because it's real and it's us. Very few go through life with a storybook family. There is no quick edit of our vlog footage that can keep us from ignoring reality. Many of us might not have it nearly as bad as David and his family had it. Some may have had it worse than David and his family. This story exists to show us that the trouble we experience in our world, in our lives today happened in the Bible too; and to those history remembers as some of the best and most faithful.

David's story is our story too. **In the midst of the beautiful and brokenness of life God is there and grace is present.**

Towards the end of this saga... but not the end of the story, David will have more things go wrong before his Solomon is anointed king and David draws up plans for a temple, but we don't need to go there to get to the grace of this story... David sings this long beautiful song of thanksgiving in Second Samuel 22. Highlights from the song are like this:

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,

my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,

my shield and the horn of my salvation,

my stronghold and my refuge,

my savior; you save me from violence.

I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,

and I am saved from my enemies.

For the waves of death encompassed me,

the torrents of perdition assailed me;

the cords of Sheol entangled me,

the snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called upon the Lord;

to my God I called.

From his temple he heard my voice,

and my cry came to his ears. You delivered me from strife with the peoples; you kept me as the head of the nations, The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock,

and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation,

the God who gave me vengeance

and brought down peoples under me,

who brought me out from my enemies;
you exalted me above my adversaries,
you delivered me from the violent.
For this I will extol you, O Lord, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.

David has come to the point of reflection. He is able to look back on the highs and lows and even it didn't feel like it. Even when he didn't deserve it. Even when it felt like he was being punished. God was with him. God was with David even when David turned away from God. God didn't spare him from the awfulness of his decisions. God didn't grant David a fairytale life of ease. God didn't grant David a get out of the consequences of sin free card. God loved David. God stayed with David. God went with David even when David didn't want God, didn't feel God or couldn't find God. God was with David all along the way. When David finally realizes That God is with him all the way, he sings. David worships God with all his heart. Because this holy, perfect, powerful God stuck with David even when he messed it all up.

That's why this story is still here for us. To remind us that as we are making a mess of our lives. When it feels like everything is against us. When feels like it can't get any worse. When we feel unloved or unloveable. When feel alone and estranged and betrayed and like a major screw up. God is with us. When we turn away from God, God is still here. God still loves us and sticks with us no matter how bad it gets or how much we run from God or when we can find God in the perfectly imperfectness of our lives. God is here, loving us back into God's arms.

Arms stretched open wide by our sin, taking our shame, dying to love us, sacrificing to deliver us, mighty to save us and our perfectly imperfect lives.
Amen.