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David Mourns Absalom
Second Samuel 18:19 to 19:8a

David mourns Absalom DIG: Why was David so preoccupied with Absalom's safety and so little concerned with his own or those of his soldiers? What did David temporarily set aside while he was grieving over Absalom? How can leaders still lead while suffering? Was Joab justified in his rebuke of David? Joab's confrontation with David was not the first time someone had confronted him about his actions. Review First Samuel 17:28-30 (Eliab), First Samuel 25:20-25 (Abigail), and Second Samuel 12:1-17 (Nathan) and compare these situations to the one here. How did David respond in each situation? What can we learn about how to respond when confronted about our actions?

REFLECT: As David dropped his head in sorrow, so his men dropped theirs in shame. It was as if they had been defeated in the battle rather than emerging victorious. Are there times when the cost of victory should outweigh the joy that victory? Why or why not? Grief can freeze us, even in those times when decisive action is needed. How can a person's response in difficulty reveal his or her trust, or lack of trust, in ADONAI? What attitudes should we exhibit when showing appreciation that point others to Messiah? How can believers maintain a balance between "letting God be God" and seizing "God moment's" in life?

976 BC

The civil war was over and the rebellion crushed. All that remained was for **Joab** to notify **the king** and return **him** safely to **Jerusalem**. But it was a bittersweet victory for **David**. When the enemy is your own **son**, there can be no triumph. No celebration.

Who would tell David? **Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok** said: **Let me run and take the news to the king that ADONAI has vindicated him by delivering him from the hand of his enemies. Ahimaaz** was a well-known runner and **he**

volunteered to take the news to **the king** at **Mahanaim**, some three miles away. Even though **he** was very enthusiastic, **he** didn't realize what **he** was asking for. **Joab** knew that the message needed to be conveyed with compassion and skill. All Ahimaaz knew was that the battle was won and **David** had to be told. **"You are not the one to take the news today," the general told him. Ahimaaz** was the son of Zadok the priest, a close associate of **Joab**; one does not send the son of another ranking cabinet officer on a high-risk mission. The mission was risky because **the king's son** was **dead.** The exchange between **Ahimaaz** and **Joab** is burdened and ominous, even though understated. **Joab** didn't know how **David** would respond, but **he** knew it wouldn't be good **(Second Samuel 18:19-20a)**.[446]

Joab knew that if **David** saw **Ahimaaz**, **the king** would assume all the news was good; and while the victory was good news, the death of **Absalom** would be bad news. **"You may take the news another time** when the news is better**, but you must not do so today, because the king's son is dead." Then,** to protect **Ahimaaz**, **Joab** selected a person only known as **the Cushite** (probably one of **his** own servants)**, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed down before Joab and then ran off.** Undeterred, **Ahimaaz** continued to annoy **Joab** and ask for permission to **run**. **Again said to Joab, "Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite." But Joab** replied: **My son, why do you want to go? You don't have any news that will bring you a reward.** Persistent to the end, Ahimaaz pleads a third time, saying: **Come what may, I want to run behind him.** Weary of hearing **the young man** continue to badger **him** about the matter, **Joab** relented and gave **his** approval. **Ahimaaz's** route, though less direct and therefore a mile or two longer than that of **the Cushite**, would be over smoother and more level ground which enabled him to arrive **at Mahanaim** in less time **(Second Samuel 18:20b-23)**. So even though **the Cushite** had a head start, **Ahimaaz outran him**.

Two runners: The scene switches to **the king**, anxiously waiting for good news in **Mahanaim**. **While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates** waiting for news of the conflict**, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. The watchman called out to the king and reported it. The king** said: **If he is alone, he must** be a courier and **have good news** (many runners meant they were running from the enemy)**. And the runner came closer and closer. Then the watchman saw another runner, and he called down to the gatekeeper, "Look, another man running alone." The king** said: **He must be bringing**

good news also (Second Samuel 18:24-26).

The First Message from Ahimaaz: **The watchman** said: **It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok. "He's a good man," the king said, "He comes with good news." David** assumed that a person like **Ahimaaz** would not be chosen to bring bad **news**. This was the very reason **Joab** didn't want to send **Ahimaaz** to begin with. When **he** approached **David**, **Ahimaaz,** not knowing exactly what to say simply **called out, "Shalom." He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and** blurted out a positive summary: **Praise be to YHVH your God! He has delivered up those who lifted their hands against my lord the king.** Only then was **David** told of the victory. But **the king** was also expecting **good news** about **Absalom**. The vagueness of the message only intensified **David's** anxiety. So **the king** asked: **Is the young man Absalom safe?** That's all that really counts. But **Ahimaaz,** so eager to reach **the king** first, ended up having nothing to say. **He** answered, probably looking at the ground: **I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king's servant and me, your servant, but I don't know what it was. Ahimaaz** was lying through **his** teeth. **Absalom** was dead. When **Ahimaaz** had **his** chance, **he** turned coward. When **he** actually was in the presence of **the king** and saw **his** anguish, **he** couldn't bring **himself** to tell **David** and pretended not to know. Then **the king** said: **Stand aside and wait here. Then he stepped aside, stood there and** watched **the Cushite** deliver the right message in the right way **(Second Samuel 18:27-30).**

The Second Message from the Cushite: **Then the Cushite arrived and** gave a straight answer, but nevertheless tried to break the news gently. **He** said: **My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.** For the second time **David** is told about the victory but **he** still didn't know about **Absalom**. So **the king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" The Cushite** replied: **May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you** (Hebrew: *raah* meaning *for evil, misery, distress, injury*) **be like that young man (Second Samuel 18:31-32). The Cushite** was a lot more direct and honest. But that was not the **good news David** wanted to hear.

David Mourns Absalom: The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: **O my son Absalom! My son my son Absalom! If only I** (in the emphatic position) **had died instead of you – O Absalom, my son, my son (Second Samuel 18:33).** There is no doubt that deep affection played a part in **David's** response. But there is a deeper dimension to **David's** grief. As we must use **17:14b** to control our overall view of **18:1** to **19:8**, we must also use **12:10** to illumine **David's** sorrows. How **Nathan's** words must have echoed in **David's** conscience: **Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house.** It was **David's** guilt that inflamed **his** grief.[447]

If **David** had led **his men** as **he** had originally intended instead of being shut-up in **his** own thoughts, **he** might have avoided the emotional impasse that prevented **him** from appreciating all that **his** army had endured in order to achieve **his** victory. But **he** was dealing with guilt. **He** was well aware that **his** adultery had caused all the problems in **his** family. **He** was tormented. **He** was a **father** who had never taken the necessary steps to correct **his** ambitious and spoiled **son**. So here, **David** expressed the wish that **he would** have died in **his** place. So we end with a paradox: a safe kingdom and a despondent **king**.

While **the king** was still far from **Jerusalem**, submerged in grief, the army was unrewarded and the country leaderless. It was a dangerous situation in which some upstart could attempt to seize power; and in the absence of any prophetic word, **Joab** played the key role in the difficult task of bringing **David** out of **his** mental fog.[448]

Joab was told, "The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." The commander could not have been altogether surprised by the news that **the king** was grieving for **his son**; but for **the** victorious **army**, it was hard to accept that **David** had no word of appreciation for **their** courage and sacrifice in battle. **And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning,**

because on that day the troops heard it said: **The king is grieving for his son. The men stole into the City that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle. David** could not have ignored **the army** more completely if it had returned defeated. There was no victory march. **The king covered his face and cried aloud, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son (Second Samuel 19:1-4)! He** shut everyone out; **he** wanted to be alone.

Joab's Disapproval: Then Joab went into the house to the king. He knew **he** had to break into **David's** misery and isolation if **David** was going to have any credibility as **king**. **The general** was a brutal man and **he** said things to **David** that only someone in **his** position could say: **Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines** because **Absalom** would have slaughtered everyone if **he** had been victorious. The heart of **Joab's** complaint was this: **You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. They** were being dishonored. **I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead.** The hard-hitting sequence was calculated to bring **David** face to face with the reality that **he** couldn't bring **Absalom** back, and **he** was **the king** and **he** needed to put **his** personal feelings aside and act like one!

Having said **his** piece, **Joab** proceeded to deliver an ultimatum. **Now go out and encourage your men.** Immediate action was needed to retain the allegiance of the army. **I swear by ADONAI that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth until now (Second Samuel 19:5-7).** This was no small matter. **David's** victory was won at great risk.[449]

David's Appearance: So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway (Second Samuel 19:8a). But by then there was no one to greet **him**. No mention is made of **his** speaking kindly, or indeed of **his** speaking to anyone at all. **When the men were told, "The king is sitting in the gateway," they all came before him.** And then **they** saw **his** face with its evidence of suffering and grief. From this we sense that the crisis was avoided. **His** supporters remained loyal.

David had a choice to make; to continue in grief over the consequences of **his** repented sins – or to look up to **God** and see **His** holiness, love and power. Though our children are greatly influenced by their upbringing, yet their choices as adults

are their own. We have the fantastic opportunity of prayer, of calling out to **ADONAI** for them that **He** softens their heart and draws them to **Himself**. **The LORD** loves our children even more than we do and he so desires great joy and peace for each of our children. **YHVH** listens to our prayers and has promised to answer our prayer, doing what is according to **His** will **(First John 5:14-15)**. Prayer is a much better option to take.