

GOD HELPS DAVID IN HIS ADVERSITIES

2 Samuel 12:15-20:26

Key Verse: 18:33; 19:4

"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 had died instead of you--O Absalom, my son, my son!'...The king covered his face and cried aloud, 'O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!'"

Romans 6:23a says, "For the wages of sin is death..." These days many people commit light and heavy sins and just forget about it. But it does not work that way. If one sins, sin bears fruits. One who committed sin must eat the fruits of his sin. Those who are around one who committed sin also must share the fruits of sin he had committed. David committed sin and repented his sin before God. When David humbly repented of his sin before God, God graciously forgave his sins and promised that he would not die because of his sins. Our God the Almighty loves sinners, but he hates the sin in a person's heart. In today's passage we learn how God loved David, and at the same time, how he hated the sin in David's heart. God severely punished David until the fruits of sin in David were purged away. The fruits of sin also crucially affected David's family and others. When we read today's passage, it seems that God is too severe in punishing people's sins. In today's message we learn a very important spiritual lesson. David was in unbearable adversities. But he depended on God absolutely. Also, David loved Absalom more than his kingship or himself. In this passage we learn that

David reveals himself to be a man after God's own heart, despite himself.

I. Absalom returns to Jerusalem (12:15-16:14)

First, the death of David's child. (12:15-31) After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. What did David do when the child of romance became critically ill? David did not call the royal physicians and magic artists in an attempt to heal his child. Mostly many Christians bring their sick children to the hospital, then they pray for their healing. But David was different. Before the Almighty God, he prayed, fasting and spending many nights lying on the ground. His loyal subjects encouraged him to eat, but he refused. On the seventh day, the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him the news that his son was dead. But David sensed that his son was dead when he saw people whispering among themselves. His officials were perplexed, wondering what he would do. When his son was sick, he fasted and did not sleep. Then what would he do if he heard about his son's death? But to their surprise, David got up and stopped his fasting and weeping, changed his clothes and went to the house of God and worshiped. To his men, it was a great surprise. So they asked, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!" He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me." David had faith in the sovereignty of God. David believed that God gives man life and takes away man's life according to his time schedule. David accepted God's act as his sovereign rule upon his son. Then God blessed him and gave him another son, Solomon, through Bathsheba.

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Second, Absalom kills Amnon. (13:1-39) David's sin bore bad fruit. Now the fruits of his sin spread, and many had to eat the fruits of his sin. Of course this doesn't support the theory of cause and effect, but it explains God's truth in the Old Testament before Jesus' coming. In the course of time Amnon son of David became very sick with love. He liked one of his sisters, Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Amnon became so sick with love that he lost his reason. There was a friend of Amnon called Jonadab, who was mischievous, devious and sadistic. He spoke to Amnon, used by Satan, to seduce his sister Tamar. Tempted by Jonadab, Amnon molested his sister Tamar. Then something strange happened in his heart. Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. So he put her out and bolted the door after her. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her richly ornamented robe of a princess, put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

These days secular humanists claim that physical love is the best. But physical love does not last long. There are so many people who are gripped with separation anxiety, and the divorce rate is higher than we could imagine. So many gorgeous and beautiful looking boys and girls are from broken families. Physical love is not real love; it is only the expression of promiscuity. Amnon is a good example of this.

When David heard what had happened, he was furious. (13: 21) But David did not rebuke or punish his son. Probably David was not completely healed spiritually, even though his sins were forgiven. He was too weak to rebuke and punish Amnon. So he just ignored him. But Tamar's brother Absalom's anger begot murder. Absalom said nothing, but he held his hatred for Amnon in his heart for two years until it grew too big to bear. One day he carefully planned Amnon's death. The occasion was a feast, to which all of his brothers were invited.

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Some of Absalom's men were told to strike Amnon when he was drunk. When his servants struck the drunken Amnon, he died. Everyone fled. At the news, David's heart sank. Absalom went into exile, hiding from his father. King David mourned for his son every day. After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years. And the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death. (13:37-39)

Third, Joab arranges Absalom's return. (14:1-33) Joab, the commander-in-chief of David's army, wanted to change the present situation. (20) Because David was unhappy on account of Absalom, the whole nation was unhappy. As a king, David had many things to do, but all he did was to long for his oldest son Absalom. Joab got tired of looking at David's sorrowful face, so he decided to do something. (2) Joab used a woman who was a good actress. He thought she would be able to convince David to bring back his son, who had murdered his brother. The woman's message touched David's heart, especially, her message, "A dead man's life spilled out on the ground cannot be recovered; but the living can be restored." (14:14) After listening to her petition, David sympathized with her and promised to protect her remaining son. Then David sensed that it was Joab's ploy, and he agreed to bring Absalom back.

But David would not grant him the people's welcome, nor did he see Absalom's face. 14:24 reads, "But the king said, 'He must go to his own house; he must not see my face.' So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king." David wanted to see him so intensely, but he could not see Absalom's face because sin created a distance between them; it is human tragedy. Joab was a humanly loyal soldier to King David. But whatever he did, he did in his own way. He never knew King David's heart. His bringing Absalom

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fused insurrection and rebellion in the kingdom of David. Human loyalty is in fact based on selfishness. Therefore we must learn how to be loyal to God first, and next, to be faithful to each other.

Fourth, Absalom's conspiracy. (15:1-37) Absalom spent four years making himself very popular among those whose hearts were bitter and who were oppressed, those full of petitions and complaints. Absalom dressed in the robe of a prince and stood by the city gate. There, he listened to the grievances of people coming into the city to petition the king for justice. Then he blocked their way and drew their attention to himself and promised that if he had power, he would see that justice was done for each person. His campaign promises stirred people's hearts. Using his privilege as a prince, he stole the hearts of the men of Israel. (15:1-6)

One day Absalom made Joab mad enough to come to him, and he finally got his chance to see the king by Joab's arrangement. (14:23-33) After that, he went to the king and got permission to go to Hebron. Then he sent secret messengers throughout the tribe of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'" Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. Among them was Ahithophel, the king's wisest counselor. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing. (15:7-12)

Fifth, David leaves Jerusalem. (15:13-37) David was a great warrior and a man of keen insight. He grasped the present situation, that Absalom's conspiracy was gaining strength and his rebellion would succeed for the time being. Of course, if he fought against Absalom, he could strike him and his followers down overnight.

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But David never wanted to see his people fight, shedding their blood, nor did he want the holy city Jerusalem bathed in blood. So he curbed his kingly pride and decided to take flight. A king would rather die than take flight. But because David was a shepherd of his people and because he was a man of God, he chose to take flight, humbling himself.

Ittai the Gittite was a foreigner. But he was one of the mighty men in David's elite fighting corps. So he had no reason to get involved in politics. But he wanted to follow David. 15:21 reads, "But Ittai replied to the king, 'As surely as the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.'"

Look at verse 23. "The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert." It was indeed a time of distress for King David. But there were many people who were loyal to him. Zadok the high priest was one of them. He brought the ark of the Lord to follow David, but David ordered him to go back to the city. 15:25,26 reads, "Then the king said to Zadok, 'Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, "I am not pleased with you," then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.'" In his adversity, David experienced the deep love of God and honored him as God. He depended on God for his future absolutely. He acknowledged that he was at the mercy of God. If God was pleased, he would bring him back to Jerusalem; if he was not pleased, he would die in the desert. He thought the ark of God belonged to God and to Jerusalem, the holy city. He had no right to bring the ark of God with a miracle-seeking mentality. He depended on God in the time of his adversity.

But David was not lazy. And he was not fatalistic about his situation. The king asked Zadok the priest, "Go back to the city with your son Ahimaaz and Jonathan son of Abiathar to see about Absalom's movement." David said, "I will wait at the fords in the desert until word comes from you to inform me." So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there. David sent another man, Hushai, one of the wisest strategists, back to Jerusalem. David said to him, "If you go with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city, you can help me." David sent him to Absalom so that he might frustrate Ahithophel's strategy, because David knew he was the best strategist among his men. Hushai arrived at Jerusalem to carry out his mission at the moment Absalom was entering the city.

Sixth, troublesome persons. (16:1-14) When a great man is in trouble, those around him show their true colors. Ziba came with needed supplies and accused Mephibosheth, saying that he thought the house of Israel would give him back his grandfather's kingdom. Ziba was an opportunist. Because of his selfishness, David was burdened with sorrow.

As King David approached Bahurim, Shimei son of Gera cursed him as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and David's guard were on David's right and left. "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!" Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his

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head." 16:11,12 reads, "David then said to Abishai and all his officials, 'My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today.'" David accepted this punishment as God's punishment and asked God's mercy on him through this event. David did not look at Shimei but looked at God and asked God's mercy on him.

II. David returns to Jerusalem (16:15-20:26)

First, Ahithophel and Hushai. (16:15-17:23) Ahithophel was a counselor with a reputation for always being right. (16:23) His counseling was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how David thought. David knew that as long as Ahithophel was with Absalom, he and his men would be annihilated. So David prayed that the Lord would turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. (15:31) Even if Absalom didn't want to fight against his father David, there was no choice. He could not but fight against his father King David. Man does not make the situation; the situation produces heroes, conspirators and rebels, friends and enemies. Acknowledging that he had to fight against his father, Absalom took Ahithophel's advice to sleep with his father's concubines, so that his relationship with his father would be irrevocably broken, and so that Absalom could not but fight for the throne. Nathan had prophesied that this would happen to shame David. (12: 11,12) Ahithophel's next advice was to attack immediately. 17:1-3 reads, "Ahithophel said to Absalom, 'I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. I would attack him while he is weary and weak. I would strike him with terror, and then all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only the king and bring all the people back to you. The death of the

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man you seek will mean the return of all; all the people will be unharmed." If Absalom had taken this advice, he probably would have won the war.

Absalom also asked the advice of Hushai, who was David's friend. David had sent him back to Jerusalem to serve as a spy. (15:32-37) Hushai knew Absalom's weakness very well. He knew Absalom was very fearful inwardly. When Absalom asked his advice, he gave the opposite counsel. 17:7,8 reads, "Hushai replied to Absalom, 'The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time. You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops.'" Then Hushai concluded his advice in verse 10, "Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave." Absalom and the men of Israel adopted Hushai's advice. It was because the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster upon Absalom. (17:14) God was punishing David so as to purge away the fruits of his sins. But God was with David as a good shepherd when David was in deep trouble. Because God was with David, David won the war before fighting.

Second, Absalom's death. (17:24-18:18) David was unwilling to wage war against his son and his men. But there was no choice for him. He had to restore the holy city Jerusalem and the kingdom of David for the sake of God. He remained no more in sentimental humanism. David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. David sent the troops out a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. (18:1-3)

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The king told the troops, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake."
(18:5b)

The army marched into the field to fight, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. There the army of Israel was defeated by David's men, and the casualties that day were great--twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the whole countryside, and the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword. During the war, Absalom happened to ride through the forest. As the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's head got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule kept on going. When Joab was told that Absalom was caught in the tree, he went where Absalom was, and while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree, Joab plunged three javelins into Absalom's heart. And ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him. They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. It's a tragic story that Absalom was killed in that manner. God made him able and handsome. In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. He had long hair which all people envied. (14:25,26) He could have used his ability and handsome appearance for the glory of God instead of attempting to kill his own father.

Third, David weeps. (18:19-19:8a) Joab knew that even the news of victory would not be good news to David if he learned of Absalom's death. So he did not want Ahimaaz son of Zadok to run with the news. Joab appointed a Cushite to run to the king and report everything. But Ahimaaz was elated by the victory, and he outran the Cushite. While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, Ahimaaz came to him and reported about the great victory. Then the king asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz answered, "I saw great confusion just

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as Joab was about to send the king's servant and me, your servant, but I don't know what it was." The Cushite also came to David. 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 be like that young man." (18:19-32)

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 had died instead of you--O Absalom, my son, my son!" (18:33) As the king was weeping and mourning for Absalom, for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because the king was grieving for his son. The soldiers stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle. The king covered his face and cried out with his dead heart, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" As a king, David's weeping seems to be nasty. But it is an exact description of God's mind toward sinners. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16) It is obvious that when God sent his one and only Son to save men from their sins, he cried, as David cried for his son Absalom.

Joab, a soldier, did not understand David's heart. He did not understand that David was a father before he was a king. He did not understand that David was a man of God and a shepherd before he was a king with dignity. Joab rebuked David, saying, "I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. Otherwise, this will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come upon you from your youth till now." So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. And they all came before him. Joab was a cruel man; anyway, God used him to restore

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David to his kingship, overcoming his sentimentalism.

Fourth, David returns to Jerusalem. (19:8b-43) David had been betrayed by many people in his time of adversity. Now that Absalom was dead and the rebellion had ended, the people turned again to David for leadership, for he was their shepherd. When David was ready to return to Jerusalem, the men of Judah took the initiative to bring him back to Jerusalem. Then the people of Israel complained about it. People think and move according to the situation. When David was going into exile, they sided with Absalom. Now that David was coming back to Jerusalem, they wanted to show favor to David first. People are like pieces of cloud floating around in the sky according to the weather situation. (19:8b-15)

On the way back to Jerusalem, David met several people. One was Shimei. He repented of the way he had acted when David was fleeing Jerusalem. (16:5-14) He deserved severe punishment--at least lifetime imprisonment or twenty years' hard labor. But David unconditionally forgave him. If anyone wants to be a leader, he must be clear about reward and punishment. He should punish those who deserve punishment; he should reward those who deserve reward. This is the basic principle of leadership. But David was different. One of his generals, Abishai, asked him, "Shouldn't Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the Lord's anointed." David replied, "Should anyone be put to death in Israel today?" (19:22) David knew that victory came from God; God delivered the kingdom of David from enemies and from much bloodshed. So to David, it was the day of God's grace upon him and his people. When David thought about God's grace, he could not be a petty man by punishing petty men. This event seems to be small, but in it David revealed himself to be a man of God and a good shepherd of his people. He did not act according to his feelings, but according to the truth of

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God.

Mephibosheth went down to meet the king. The king asked him, "Why didn't you go with me, Mephibosheth?" He told him that he wanted to go, but his servant betrayed him. But David didn't try to figure out who was lying and who was telling the truth; he just forgave him. David also met Barzillai, who had helped him. David wanted to pay back his debt to his kindness. In one act after another David revealed that he was a man of God and shepherd of his people.

Fifth, Joab restores his position as commander. While King David was bestowing favor upon many people, Joab murdered Amasa. Joab disobeyed David and killed Absalom. So King David removed him from the position of commander-in-chief and gave his position to Amasa, who was Absalom's army commander. At that time, once again a national crisis occurred. Sheba started a rebellion. David sent Amasa to muster the army, but Amasa was late. So David sent out Abishai, Joab's brother, in command of the whole army. When Joab met Amasa, he was ready to destroy him. Joab grabbed Amasa's beard with one hand, and with the other he stabbed him in the stomach. After this, Joab pursued Sheba to the city of Abel. He besieged the city. Then a woman asked him not to destroy the city. So Joab made a proposition, "If you hand Sheba over, the city will be safe." Then the people of the city cut off the head of Sheba and threw it to Joab. In this way, a tragic war was averted, and Joab restored his position as the commander-in-chief over David's army. David had to overcome his personal animosity toward Joab and keep him as the head over his army. If David were a petty man, another tragic event might have happened because of Joab. But David had a heart to embrace Joab.

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In this passage we learn that God is love, and at the same time God is holy. God loves his children, but God doesn't ignore the sin in his children's hearts. Because of this, God loved David, but God punished him beyond description.

In this passage we also see a picture of human life. In human life there are many ups and downs. There are times of sorrow and joy, times of victory and adversity. Living in this world, most people become victims of the situation. But David was different. He believed that God is living. David is the best example of one who believed that God is living. In David's life, his son Absalom's rebellion and death might have been the most heart-breaking event. He was out to destroy his father David. But David humbled himself and made just one request, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." (18:5b) When David heard the news of his son Absalom's death, he felt that his heart was dead; he began to cry endlessly, wishing that he had died instead of Absalom. Here we learn that David was a man after God's own heart. He was the exact representation of God's love toward sinners. David was in adversities, but he did not turn away from God; rather, he loved God and loved people more than himself.