

The Life of David

David Restores Absalom

2 Samuel 14:1-33

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Scripture

Ken Sande writes in his book, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, how loving actions can communicate forgiveness and reconciliation. He writes:

Loving actions can do much more than change your feelings; they can also communicate in unmistakable terms the reality of your forgiveness and your commitment to reconciliation. Thomas Edison apparently understood this principle. When he and his staff were developing the incandescent light bulb, it took hundreds of hours to manufacture a single bulb. One day, after finishing a bulb, he handed it to a young errand boy and asked him to take it upstairs to the testing room. As the boy turned and started up the stairs, he stumbled and fell, and the bulb shattered on the steps. Instead of rebuking the boy, Edison reassured him and then turned to his staff and told them to start working on another bulb. When it was completed several days later, Edison demonstrated the reality of his forgiveness in the most powerful way possible. He walked over to the same boy, handed him the bulb, and said, “Please take this up to the testing room.” Imagine how that boy must have felt. He knew that he didn’t deserve to be trusted with this responsibility again. Yet, here it was, being offered to him as though nothing had ever happened. Nothing could have restored this boy to the team more clearly, more quickly, or more fully. How much more should those of us who have experienced reconciliation with God be quick to demonstrate our forgiveness with concrete actions.¹

King David had certainly experienced reconciliation with God. He was not able, however, to achieve a true reconciliation with his son Absalom. Three years had elapsed since Absalom had

¹ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 222–223.

murdered his half-brother Amnon and fled in exile to Geshur. Joab, David's nephew and chief military general, wanted to facilitate reconciliation between David and Absalom. The narrative we are about to read is about David reconciling with Absalom, but we should keep in mind that it was a false reconciliation.

Let's read about David restoring Absalom in 2 Samuel 14:1-33:

¹Now Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom. ²And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, "Pretend to be a mourner and put on mourning garments. Do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead. ³Go to the king and speak thus to him." So Joab put the words in her mouth.

⁴When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and paid homage and said, "Save me, O king." ⁵And the king said to her, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶And your servant had two sons, and they quarreled with one another in the field. There was no one to separate them, and one struck the other and killed him. ⁷And now the whole clan has risen against your servant, and they say, 'Give up the man who struck his brother, that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed.' And so they would destroy the heir also. Thus they would quench my coal that is left and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth."

⁸Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you." ⁹And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be guiltless." ¹⁰The king said, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again." ¹¹Then she said, "Please let the king invoke the Lord your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more, and my son be not destroyed." He said, "As the Lord lives, not one hair of

your son shall fall to the ground.”

¹² Then the woman said, “Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.” He said, “Speak.” ¹³ And the woman said, “Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again. ¹⁴ We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast. ¹⁵ Now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid, and your servant thought, ‘I will speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant. ¹⁶ For the king will hear and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the heritage of God.’ ¹⁷ And your servant thought, ‘The word of my lord the king will set me at rest,’ for my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil. The Lord your God be with you!”

¹⁸ Then the king answered the woman, “Do not hide from me anything I ask you.” And the woman said, “Let my lord the king speak.” ¹⁹ The king said, “Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?” The woman answered and said, “As surely as you live, my lord the king, one cannot turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has said. It was your servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant. ²⁰ In order to change the course of things your servant Joab did this. But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth.”

²¹ Then the king said to Joab, “Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.” ²² And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant.” ²³ So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. ²⁴ And the king said, “Let him dwell apart in his own house;

he is not to come into my presence.” So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king’s presence.

²⁵ Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. ²⁶ And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king’s weight. ²⁷ There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a beautiful woman.

²⁸ So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king’s presence. ²⁹ Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. ³⁰ Then he said to his servants, “See, Joab’s field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.” So Absalom’s servants set the field on fire. ³¹ Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?” ³² Absalom answered Joab, “Behold, I sent word to you, ‘Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, ‘Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.’” Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.’ ” ³³ Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom. (2 Samuel 14:1-33)

Introduction

David was king over all Israel. He was God’s king on earth. He was the Lord’s anointed. David foreshadowed his greater son, Jesus, who was the Promised Messiah.

But David demonstrated dramatically by his sins of adultery and murder that he also needed God’s forgiveness. He needed God’s enabling power to help him gain victory over his failings.

The Life of David

David's sin also caused havoc in his family. God was chastening David by decreeing that "the sword shall never depart from your house" and "I will raise up evil against you out of your own house" (2 Samuel 12:10–11). David was manipulated by Joab into reconciling with Absalom, but it was not a true reconciliation. The eventual results of this false reconciliation would cause further havoc in David's family.

Reconciliation is defined in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* as "an instance or occasion of friendly relations being restored."² Sadly, this kind of reconciliation did not occur between David and Absalom.

Lesson

Second Samuel 14:1-33 shows us how false reconciliation sometimes occurs.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Request (14:1-20)
2. The Return (14:21-27)
3. The Reconciliation (14:28-33)

I. The Request (14:1-20)

First, let's look at the request.

After Absalom murdered Amnon, he spent three years in exile in Geshur. Verse 1 says, **"Now Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom."** The translation of this verse is difficult. One commentator suggests that this be translated as follows: "Now Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart was *against* Absalom."³ Whether Joab saw David as

² Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 362.

either yearning for Absalom or antagonistic toward him, Joab decided to facilitate a reconciliation. We are not told of Joab's reason for doing so. Perhaps he wanted a genuine reconciliation between father and son. More likely, he saw the decline of David's kingdom and saw Absalom as the best hope for Israel, and so he wanted to be sure that the kingdom of Israel was preserved.

Whatever the reason, Joab sent to Tekoa, about ten miles south of Jerusalem, for a wise woman. He instructed her to dress as a mourner, to go to the king, and to speak certain words to him (14:2-3).

Thus, the woman of Tekoa went to David, paid him homage, and pretended to be a widow whose one son accidentally killed her other son. She told the king that the entire extended family was demanding that she deliver her surviving son to them so that they might put him to death for killing his brother. If that were to happen, she said that her support and her husband's family name would be wiped out (14:4-7). Her implication was that the king should spare her surviving son's life.

David told her to go home and that he would spare the life of her surviving son. The woman then asked the king to promise by an oath that her son would be spared, telling the king that if sparing her son was wrong, she and her family would bear the guilt. David then swore an oath to spare her son (14:8-11).

After David had sworn his oath, the woman asked him why he was not willing to spare his son, Absalom, just as he was willing to spare her son. She reasoned that life is uncertain and once it is lost, it cannot be restored again. So David should not remain unreconciled to Absalom but follow God's example of showing mercy. God himself, she argued, has devised a plan of mercy whereby the banished one will not remain an outcast. God exercised this plan in David's case when he spared David's life after his heinous sins of adultery and murder. The woman expressed her confidence that the king would do that which was right concerning

the judgment of her son (14:12-17).

At this point, David suspected that Joab was behind the woman's story. She confessed that Joab had indeed put her up to bringing this story to the king (14:18-20).

As we read this story, it reminds us of Nathan's earlier confrontation with David. He also told David a story, as did the woman of Tekoa. But Nathan's story was designed to get David to submit to God's word, whereas the woman's story was designed to get David to act contrary to God's word. Commentator William Blaikie puts it this way: "Nathan's parable was designed to rouse the king's conscience as against his feelings; the woman of Tekoa's, as prompted by Joab, to rouse his feelings against his conscience."⁴

In verse 2, the woman from Tekoa is described as a "wise woman." Commentator Dale Ralph Davis asks, "So where is wisdom in 2 Samuel 14?"⁵ The woman is persuasive in getting David to agree to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. The problem is that David is no longer leading. He is following. As Davis says, "But David no longer acts; he is acted upon. In this chapter David reacts rather than rules; he does not reign but consents (v. 21); he appears decisive (v. 24) but caves in (v. 33). Is this wisdom?"⁶

Davis concludes, "This chapter should haunt the church, not to mention the individual, believing or unbelieving. It is possible to have all the signs of wisdom—plans, strategies, accomplishments—and yet be utterly devoid of it."⁷

II. The Return (14:21-27)

Second, let's notice the return.

Because of the woman's request to David, **the king said to**

⁴ William G. Blaikie, *Expository Lectures on the Book of Second Samuel* (1887; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2005), 208.

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 180.

⁶ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 180.

⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 180.

Joab, “Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom” (14:21). Joab paid homage to David, blessed him, and then he went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem (14:22-23).

But when Joab and Absalom returned to Jerusalem, **the king said, “Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence.” So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king’s presence** (14:24). This situation carried on for two full years.

We then read a description of Absalom’s handsome appearance, his full head of hair, and his children (14:25-27). The Puritan commentator Matthew Henry notes about Absalom, “All that is here said of him is, 1. That he was a very handsome man.... 2. That he had a very fine head of hair.... 3. That his family began to be built up.... Nothing is said of his wisdom and piety.”⁸

Unwittingly, David put Absalom in contact with people who admired and adored him, and who would eventually side with Absalom in a rebellion against David. But, more of that in a future lesson!

As Absalom returned to Jerusalem, he may have thought that God was acting in a providential way toward him. He may have changed his mind after having to wait two years! But then, after two years, he was granted an audience with David, and there seemed to be some sort of reconciliation. We don’t know if Absalom thought in terms of God’s providence. But, from his perspective, it did appear as if providence was smiling on him.

However, we must always be careful to appeal to divine providence to justify our actions or circumstances. Adolph Hitler survived an assassination attempt on his life at Wolf’s Lair with a punctured eardrum and a temporary paralysis of an arm. Immediately following the bomb blast, Hitler was to meet with Mussolini.

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 460.

Hitler met Mussolini at the train station and took him back to Wolf's Lair to show him the damage.

“Frankly, Duce,” Hitler confessed, “I regard this event as the pronouncement of Divine Providence.”

When Mussolini admitted he had had a marvelous escape, Hitler retorted: “Marvelous? It’s more than that. It’s God’s intervention. Look at this room, at my uniform. When I reflect on this, I know nothing will happen to me. Clearly it is my divine task to continue on and bring my great enterprise to completion.”⁹

III. The Reconciliation (14:28-33)

And third, let’s see the reconciliation.

Verse 28 says, **“So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king’s presence.”** Absalom sent for Joab twice but Joab did not come to see Absalom. We are not told the reason. So, frustrated and wanting to get Joab’s attention, Absalom ordered his servants to set fire to Joab’s field of barley. That got Joab’s attention and he went to Absalom demanding to know the reason for the fire. Absalom told Joab that he wanted to see the king even though that might mean death for Absalom. Joab went to David and told him that Absalom wanted to see him (14:29-32). Verse 33b says that Absalom **“came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.”** This was a perfunctory kiss. There was no heart in it. And there was certainly no true reconciliation between David and Absalom, as subsequent events will show. Gordon Keddie writes, “Far from being a reconciliation, it was the final seal of David’s defeat in the case of God’s law versus Absalom over the death of Amnon.”¹⁰

⁹ Robert Leckie, *Delivered from Evil: The Saga of World War II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 731–32.

¹⁰ Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1990), 137.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed David restoring Absalom in 2 Samuel 14:1-33, let us always seek true reconciliation.

Biblical reconciliation involves repentance and forgiveness. Absalom wanted forgiveness but he did not repent of his sin. He needed to acknowledge that what he had done was sin. He needed to accept whatever punishment was due to him for his sin. However, he simply wanted the benefits of forgiveness—reconciliation—without actually repenting of his sin.

I mentioned at the start of this lesson that reconciliation is when friendly relations are restored. If you are unreconciled to someone, first see if there is something for which you need to repent. If so, then repent of your sin and seek the other person's forgiveness.

Sometimes you may be unreconciled to a person because of the sin of that other person. You must forgive that person. However, unless that person repents of his or her sin, you will not be able to achieve a reconciliation. Reconciliation involves both forgiveness *and* repentance.

Finally, we should be aware that reconciliation is possible because of reconciliation with God. All sin is first against God. So, we must always repent of our sin in order for God to forgive us. Only then is reconciliation with God possible.

Are you reconciled to God? If not, confess your sin to God. Repent of your sin. And ask him to forgive you. He will do so and you will be reconciled to God.

Are you reconciled to others? If not, confess your sin to that person. Repent of your sin. And ask that person to forgive you. That person should do so and the two of you should be reconciled.

May each one of you be reconciled to God and to one another. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org