

# The Wages of Bitterness & Sweetness of Trusting Christ [Absalom]

By Pastor Matthew Black

**Text:** 2 Samuel 13:21-38

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**Series:** Life of David

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**Introduction:** Open your Bible to the book of **2 Samuel 13**. For this evening's message, we are looking a message entitled: "The Wages of Bitterness & the Sweetness of Trusting in Christ".

Why do we become bitter? Bitterness usually sprouts up because of an external source. It usually comes because a perceived injustice is not dealt with correctly. Bitterness is such a dangerous trap because of our sinful nature of unrelenting self-centeredness. Our sinful nature does not want to rest and trust in God's justice. Instead our anger plants seeds of bitterness in us. How can we avoid the ravages of bitterness? Tonight we are going to find out as we look at a very bitter man, Absalom.

As you know, Absalom was very bitter about his sister Tamar who was violated by her half brother Amnon. From that day and for two years afterward, Absalom plotted Amnon's death.

Tonight we are going to see the Character of bitterness from the life of Absalom. Then we will take some time to see the Cause, the Course, and finally the Cure for bitterness.

Let us begin by reading our text in **2 Samuel 13:21-38**. The background is that Amnon has violated Absalom's sister, Tamar, and now Absalom wants revenge. He is consumed with bitterness.

Look at this in **2 Samuel 13:21-38**, "But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth. 22 And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar. 23 And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor, which /s beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons. 24 And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant. 25 And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him: howbeit he would not go, but blessed him. 26 Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee? 27 But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. 28 Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. 29 And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled. 30 ¶ And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left. 31 Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by

with their clothes rent. 32 And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose *that* they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar. 33 Now therefore let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead: for Amnon only is dead. 34 But Absalom fled. And the young man that kept the watch lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came much people by the way of the hill side behind him. 35 And Jonadab said unto the king, Behold, the king's sons come: as thy servant said, so it is. 36 And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of speaking, that, behold, the king's sons came, and lifted up their voice and wept: and the king also and all his servants wept very sore. 37 But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day. 38 So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years. 39 And *the soul of* king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead".

I. The **Character** of Bitterness. **Verse 22**, "Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar". We find out in the next verse that for two years, Absalom is planning the murder of his half-brother Amnon.

A. The **Definition** of Bitterness. Bitterness is "a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man."<sup>1</sup> It is a "persistent sourness of the spirit".<sup>2</sup> It is "a hard-heartedness that harbors resentment about [any hurt from] the past".<sup>3</sup> Bitterness is a poison in the soul. You can recognize bitterness when you don't want to get rid of the hurt. The whole world has moved forward, but you can't get past this ONE thing! A bitter person wants to nurse the hurt and let it fester in their heart and mind. They cannot believe what was done to them. They nurse their hurt and go over it again and again in their heart and mind, thinking of new arguments to throw at the person who hurt them.

Bitterness begins in the heart because of some offence. You've been wronged. For Absalom, it was a legitimate offence. But festering over offences is not of God. James says in **James 3:14-15**, "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above but is earthly, sensual devilish".

B. The **Distinctives** of Bitterness. Yet, bitterness creeps in when it looks like some wrong is going unpunished. You or someone you love has been spoken of wrongly or taken advantage of, and you cannot simply wait on God. You cannot even take it to God. It has overtaken you. You end up going to God making your case with Him, but what you need to do is repent of the bitterness. Why?

1. Bitterness at it's heart is a lack of trust in the justice of God. A child of God is called upon to rest in God's sovereignty and control of all things. We ought to be able to trust God with Joseph and say, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good".

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<sup>1</sup>Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Hrsg.): *The Pulpit Commentary: Ephesians*. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004, S. 153.

<sup>2</sup>P.G. Matthew. *Exposition of Ephesians 4:25-32*. Grace Valley Church. Accessed at: [http://gracevalley.org/sermon\\_trans/2004/Christian\\_Life\\_2.html](http://gracevalley.org/sermon_trans/2004/Christian_Life_2.html).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln. *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians* (Word Books: Dallas, 1990), 308.

2. Another characteristic of bitterness is that it usually comes when offences and wrongs take us by surprise. In your heart you believe this wrong should never have happened. It could have been avoided! One way to avoid bitterness is to realize that God says that offences are inevitable.

- **Luke 17:1-4** "Then said he unto the disciples, **It is impossible but that offenses will come**: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him".

The Lord says that people are constantly going to be stepping on our toes and offending us. We need to be ready to forgive seven times in a day. Jesus says in another place that we should forgive seventy times seven! And even after that we need to keep forgiving.

3. Another characteristic is that bitterness often comes when we feel we are outside of our ability to cope with the circumstances. We are overwhelmed. Life is made out of the stuff that tends to bitterness. There are many hard places in life. Most of these are unexpected, come in a moment of vulnerability, and are quite beyond human resources to cope.

### C. The **Domains** of Bitterness.

1. There is the bitterness of **personal offense**. This is the hurt inflicted by other people. It hurts more because it is personal, an offense against our emotions, pocketbook, etc. It is often committed by someone who is very close to us which makes the hurt all the more intense.

a. We are not to be bitter against **Family**. This is the reason for the warning of **Colossians 3:19** "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." The offense usually involves a perceived betrayal of trust. To have given a measure of confidence and found that confidence misplaced, is a bitter experience to the flesh.

b. We are even to love our **Enemies**. **Matthew 5:43-48**, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. <sup>44</sup> But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; <sup>45</sup> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? <sup>47</sup> And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? <sup>48</sup> Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect".

2. There is the bitterness of perceived failure. Not only do we often fail to reach the expectations of others, but we often fail to reach our own expectations. This is a far more universal experience than most of us realize. Many are consumed with frustration at checked aspirations, jealousy over the success of others, or self pity

for wounded pride. All of this is part of the old life that needs to be put off. We should rejoice in the success of others.

3. There is the bitterness of loss. We have high expectations in life, and when life takes a rough turn, it is easy to say, "Things should have turned out differently" or to dwell in the past because of some loss.

Instead we ought to forget the past, and be about pleasing and glorifying God in the present. This is what Paul said in **Philippians 3:13-14**, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

- II. Let's look now at the **Course** of Bitterness. For Absalom, he plotted for two years to kill his brother. **Verse 23**, "And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor, which *is* beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons". Look at **verse 28**, "Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. 29 And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled".

Every difficulty in life is a Satanic opportunity to plant the root of bitterness in your heart. The reaction is the key to whether or not Satan succeeds. You cannot control the experience but you can control your reaction to the experience. If you are saved there is sufficient grace from God to face anything!

**Hebrews 12:15**, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled".

This verse does not even imply that the grace of God has ever failed any man because it has not. It is that we fail to appropriate the grace available.

- A. Bitterness begins as a **Root**. The consequences of a wrong reaction are tragic and far reaching. Notice that **Hebrews 12:15** talked about a root. It begins very small. So small that at first it is not even perceptible, but in the fertile soil of the sinful nature the root grows very fast. How do we get rid of that root? **Hebrews 12:15**, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled". It takes the grace of God moment by moment. You have to submit to His plan and sovereignty.
- B. Bitterness continues as **Rage**. Who are we angry with? Since you know that God is all powerful, your anger, your hurt, and **your bitterness are actually against God**. You are just like Martha. "Lord if you had been here, our brother had not died." You are angry with God because He allowed something to happen that you did not want to happen. Your problem is with God, not with men! Your problem with men is only a transfer of your problem with God.

So what do you do in your anger?

- You **withdraw from the Word of God because it convicts you of your rebellion.**
- You **withdraw from God's people because their joy convicts your own sour spirit.**

- You withdraw from God's service because you want to somehow punish God.

C. Bitterness finally **Reaches** others and defiles them. If this root of bitterness is allowed to fester in your heart **Hebrews 12:15** makes clear that the root will bear fruit. **Hebrews 12:15**, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled".

Look at the pattern of **Ephesians 4:31**, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

Sanitize yourself from these six sins that God hates. If you don't, you will defile others!

- Bitterness (hostility and resentment toward someone)
- Wrath (boiling rage)
- Anger (holding a grudge; settled animosity toward someone; unforgiving spirit)
- Clamour (raising your voice, loud insults)
- Evil Speaking (misrepresentation, one-upping in the argument)
- Malice (wishing evil toward someone)

Let me paraphrase it for you: **Ephesians 4:31** "Let all manner of bitterness, and rage, and grudges, and raising of your voice, and misrepresentation, be taken off of you and thrown in a garbage heap, with all thoughts of evil towards others".

Throw bitterness in the garbage heap before it defiles others!

D. Bitterness can bring you and other to total **Ruin**.

Bitter people can be dangerous. Those who harbor anger and desire for revenge in their hearts are ruthless.

**Romans 12:19**, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Bitter people will hurt others without mercy in their mad rage to even the score for their own hurt.

1. Absalom brought his **servants** into this mess. **Verse 28**, "Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. 29 And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled".
2. Absalom brought **his life** to ruin. **Verse 37**, "But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son [Amnon] every day". Once the murder of Amnon was committed, Absalom had to flee! No part of the land of Israel could shelter him. The cities of refuge gave no protection to a wilful murderer. Absalom was in exile for THREE YEARS. He should have been in exile for the rest of his life.
3. He brought deep pain to those around him. **Verse 37**, "...David mourned for his son every day". Bitterness just compounds sin upon sin upon sin and hurt upon hurt. Stop bitterness before it takes over your heart!

Don't let bitterness lodge in your heart. **You cannot get even.** Vengeance is the Lord's. **You can only destroy yourself and others.** Get rid of the bitterness before the bitterness gets rid of you!

III. Finally I want you to see the **Cure** for Bitterness. Does it have to be this way? Is there no hope? Is there an answer? Yes, thank God, there is hope.

A. First let me say, stay far away from those who try and encourage your bitterness. If someone gossips to you, you should say, "Shame on you" and tell them to go to the source!

Remember Jonadab, Amnon's cousin and so-called "friend"? Jonadab not only cooked up a way for Amnon to be in a position where he raped his sister, but knew since that time that Absalom from that day would kill Amnon, and he said nothing to warn Amnon before the feast. He did nothing to warn David about his son.

Look at **verses 32-33**, "And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose that they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar. 33 Now therefore let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead: for Amnon only is dead."

B. Second, stay close to **Calvary!** Turn over to **Exodus 15:22-25**, "So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. 23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? 25 And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet".

The answer is in a tree. Only through the experience of Calvary can the bitter waters of life be made sweet. Why? Because at Calvary there is an expiation of sin. All forgiveness flows from Calvary.

**Ephesians 1:7**, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace".

Isn't that what Paul tells us in **Ephesians 4:31-32**, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." There is such sweetness in Christ.

C. Give yourself to God's sovereign control of your life. God never promised you a bed of roses. When you are in trials you are to "count it all joy". **James 1:2-3**, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." You don't give thanks for the pain, but for the realization that you are growing and changing in Christ.

D. Remember Christ was wronged, and what was His response? **1 Peter 2:23**, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously". Are you able to commit yourself

to the God who judges righteously? Are you able to do good to those who betray you? Instead of bitterness we are called to **IMITATION** of Christ. This is the GOAL. **Ephesians 4:32**, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Christ's selflessness is seen in three ways: through his kindness, His tenderhearted love, and through his gracious forgiveness.

**Conclusion:** We are all tempted to be bitter when we feel wronged. Bitterness is an anger or a hurt that we allow to fester in our mind and heart. Bitterness is that "woe is me" syndrome. You may have been deeply hurt by some betrayal. The betrayal may be real or imagined, but it brings deep pain. Someone may have gotten a significant advantage by taking advantage of you. Don't allow bitterness to eat away at your spirit. Bitterness is a cancer that will destroy your spirit and others. Bitterness destroys everything it touches.

Give your bitterness to God. Regardless of who has robbed you of that which is rightfully yours, you will have been doubly robbed if you allow your loss to make you bitter. Maybe you are already bitter. Your bitterness defiles you as well as others. It colors your whole life view. It is contagious. What will you do with your hurt? Will you nurse and pet it, or will you get rid of it? God help you to get rid of it!!!