

A King's Tears – Love, Loss, and the Journey to Healing

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Texts: 2 Sam 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33

This is a story about how even the king of Israel, a man after God's own heart, had to face the death of a loved one and grieve the tragedy that followed.

I.

NGOZI

And now for something entirely different...

Today is a day of reckoning. The fields await, silent yet ominous, as we prepare for the clash of swords and the cries of men. My army stand ready, captains appointed over thousands and hundreds. We have trained, strategized, and now, we stand on the precipice of conflict.

Leadership... a burden heavy on my shoulders.

They tell me to stay behind. "Stay in the city, David. Your life is too precious." My people insist, their eyes filled with worry. They see me as their king, their leader, but also as their father. And I see them as my children. How can I abandon them now, in the hour of our greatest need?

My son, Absalom... How did we come to this? A father against his son, bound by blood yet torn apart by ambition and betrayal. The complexities of our relationship are like a tangled web, each thread representing love, disappointment, pride, and sorrow.

I turn to my captains – Joab, Abishai, Ittai. "Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake," I command. Even now, I cannot let go of my love for him. My heart aches, torn between the duty of a king and the love of a father. Proverbs tells us, "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

Wise counsel has brought us to this day, but my heart yearns for compassion, even for those who wrong us. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," the scriptures say. And so, I love my son, despite his rebellion, despite the pain he has caused.

Lord, grant me the strength to lead with wisdom, the heart to forgive with love, and the courage to face the battles within and without. As we march forward, let us remember our duty, our love, and our faith. (4 minutes)

KRYSIA

Have you ever prepared to do battle with someone you love who has done you wrong? I have. We get caught between wanting to protect ourselves while still caring for that person. We seek justice yet also wish for peace. We pray that we can stay connected even in the chaos.

In my work as a hospice chaplain I have seen a similar dynamic. In place of a king or queen in our reading could be one of my clients looking at the metaphorical dark and dangerous woods of death for a loved one: a terminally ill adult child, a parent, or a partner whose time is short. *Please, God, protect them!* they pray. Yet they know too well the risks of that battlefield where they are powerless against cancer, stroke, or dementia. They send the troops of their heart into the fray. But they know they may lose. And their pre-grief and fear are heightened when their loved one has previously abandoned, betrayed, or wronged them.

When a family member or friend we care about is gravely ill, we contemplate what life might be without them. We cycle through denial and fear, we feel sad or numb. Like David, we beg that the forces at work would “deal gently” with our person. Regardless of the complexities between us, the love abides. Into the woods we send our prayers for protection, against all reason and risking everything. Yet at times we are no match for the tall trees, rough terrain, or thick, tangled boughs.

III.

NGOZI

In the heart of the forest, where shadows creep,
Absalom ridin' high, his pride runnin' deep,
Proud of his hair, long and fair, a symbol of grace,
But tangled in an oak, now he's stuck in place,
Suspended mid-air, life's cruel affair,
The son of a king, now trapped by his snare,
A rebel heart, a father's tears,
In the tangled branches, his darkest fears.



Pride takes the fall, when you stand too tall,
In the forest of fate, hear the echoes call,
Justice comes swift, can't escape it all,

In the pit of betrayal, see the mighty fall.

Joab steps up, defies the king's plea,
Three spears in hand, no mercy to see,
Just like life, charging in, ignoring our calls,
Breaking our plans, as pride takes the fall,
David's orders, left in the dust,
The blade finds its mark, in betrayal's thrust,

Romans 12:19, vengeance is the Lord's,
But Joab strikes hard, in silence, no words,
Absalom's end, a bitter decree,
Disobedience to authority, the price ain't free.



Pride takes the fall, when you stand too tall,
In the forest of fate, hear the echoes call,
Justice comes swift, can't escape it all,



In the pit of betrayal, see the mighty fall.

The trumpet sounds, the pursuit's brought to a stop,
The battle's over, but the grief won't drop,
In a pit they lay Absalom down to rest,
Heap of stones on his grave, no royal crest,
Justice served, but the weight is profound,
A legacy shaken, echoes all around,
Pride's downfall, written in the dust,
A tale of power, betrayal, and mistrust,
In the pages of time, forever told,
A story of love, of hearts grown cold.

So remember the tale, of Absalom's fate,
The tragic end, the heavy weight,
Pride and betrayal, they lead to despair,
But justice and grace, they're always there,
In the heart of the forest, where shadows creep,
Find the light, in the lessons we keep. (4 minutes)

KRYSIA

As he heads into battle, Absalom rides a mule as befits a potential king. But the prince's long hair gets snarled up in an oak tree, and the beast continues down the path alone. As his men get slaughtered in the surrounding woods or fall into hidden caves, Absalom's head is caught by the tree branches. The man known for his good looks gets trapped by his hair, as if pride comes before a fall. It's a cautionary tale about the wages of sin. If we read this part of the story through a Christian lens, the death of a rebellious son contrasts with the death of Jesus a thousand years hence. Now the prodigal dies in vain, but then, the faithful son of God dies for us, for the truth that sets us free.

IV

NGOZI

The weight of leadership presses upon me, a burden that never lifts. My heart is torn, my spirit weary. I stand here, waiting for news that I dread, yet must face. Ahimaaz, loyal and swift, and the Cushite, both race through the dust and shadows, each carrying the fate of my son, Absalom, in their hands.

Every moment feels like an eternity. The city gate looms before me—a gate between life and death—, silent witness to my torment. I wait anxiously, praying for a miracle, hoping against hope that my son lives. My people, my soldiers, my friends—they all look to me, yet here I am, powerless, a father torn apart by love and duty.

Ah, Absalom, my son. How did we come to this?

There! I see them now. Ahimaaz runs with all his might, but why this urgency? Why this desperate haste? My heart races, fear grips my soul. I see the Cushite, not far behind, his strides purposeful, carrying the weight of truth.

God, give me strength. I am but a father, fearing for his child.

Ahimaaz: **"All is well, my lord. We have won the battle, but... Absalom..."**

Ahimaaz speaks, yet his words falter. The victory is hollow, for the price paid is too dear. I see the truth in his eyes, a father's worst fear realized. But still, I wait, needing to hear it from the Cushite, needing confirmation of the unthinkable.

Cushite: **"My lord, the Lord has avenged you this day of all who rose against you. But... Absalom, your son, is dead."**

Oh, Absalom! My son, my son! Would that I had died instead of you! Oh, Absalom, my son, my son!

The deep pain of losing a loved one—there is no solace, no escape. Romans tells us to mourn with those who mourn, and here I am, drowning in sorrow, seeking the comfort of God in this darkest of times. Psalm 34 speaks of God's presence in our sorrow, yet my heart is shattered, my soul cries out in anguish.

Lord, be with me now. Help me bear this grief, this loss. Grant me the strength to carry on, to lead my people even as my heart breaks. Comfort me, as only You can, in this time of unimaginable sorrow.

Absalom, my son. Oh, Absalom, my son...

KRYSIA

Have you ever waited impatiently for potentially bad news? King David is in that very moment of anxious expectation, poised between the inner and outer gates close to the place where the runners will deliver the pronouncement of his son's fate. It's a buffer zone, where he is neither inside nor outside the kingdom. A waiting game. A bit like Absalom, David is suspended in time. We see his hope that against all odds the news of his son

will be good. Alas, he learns that Absalom is dead. And when he hears the news he becomes “deeply moved,” meaning to quiver, quake, and rage. Despite Absalom’s fatal vanity, fratricide, and violence, he is still David’s son. We are invited to meet David the father who runs up to a private chamber so that he can weep alone. For a moment we see into his heart, the human being lamenting his fallen son. His grief is complicated. He has lost other children and yet this loss reflects poorly on David’s lenient parenting. Although he is a man of compassion, he was also cursed by God for his transgressions, that the sword would never leave his household. And God’s prophecy came to be.

I think there is a timeless message for us in this story. We wait in hope, for more time, for a good outcome of test results, for a cure. And sometimes, maybe oftentimes, miracles do happen. But in our lives we lose the people we love, including family or friends. Our own church community is still mourning the departure of our former pastor who left this church in June after twenty years of service. Some of us may also be facing other losses such as a job change, PTSD from the pandemic, or a part of our identity. Either way, grief often shakes us to our core.

Who meets us there in our hour of need? What do we have to hold onto when all seems lost? The answer comes in Psalm 130, which we sang a bit earlier. In this Psalm the writer cries from “out of the depths” to God. She asks God not to remember her wrongs but to forgive the past. In desperation her whole being waits on the LORD, more than the royal watchman wait for the dawn. She is called to put her hope in God, the source of unfailing love and redemption.

In Judaism, redemption comes from God’s heart. There is nothing we can do other than to wait and to pray. David, the unifier of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, is chosen by God to be the head of God’s spiritual house. Despite his own rebellions, crimes, and blind love of his son, David is the one whose descendants will stretch all the way to Jesus. The one who will die not for himself but for us is no son of a king but is the very son of God. The Prince of Peace. His death, however miserable, is not in vain. Rather than a stone grave for a forgotten fool, His Spirit is everywhere and in all of us. We need look no further than our own lament to find His presence. For he counts each tear, and weeps with those who weep. And how do we find this solace in our time of need? We

gather for worship. We build each other up in small groups. We seek justice in our neighborhoods. We pray for the life of the world.

As we continue to grieve and be grateful, I invite us to call upon our God. And may the Spirit of Grace deal gently with us as we wait, through the darkness of loss all the way to love, until we are found again.

Lost

by David Wagoner

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you

Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,

And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,

Must ask permission to know it and be known.

The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,

I have made this place around you.

If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.

No two trees are the same to Raven.

No two branches are the same to Wren.

If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,

You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows

Where you are. You must let it find you. — AMEN