

Introduction

The battle between putting Steve in his place on facebook and exercising mercy and compassion knowing he's unsaved

1. So, on the one hand, I want to exercise judgment, but on the other hand I know I should exercise mercy, compassion and forgiveness
2. This is similar to what we find in the God's relationship to mankind:
  - a. On the one hand, God is a righteous and just God, and because He is these things, He must judge sin
  - b. On the other hand, He is loving, gracious, merciful and forgiving, and because He is those things He desires mercy over judgement
3. So there is this tension that we see between judgment and mercy played out in the pages of the Bible, as we see God's righteousness in judging sin, but also His desire to extend mercy
4. We see an example of this in our passage today

A. The Lord judges Absalom (18:1-18)

1. As you remember, David and his men along with their families are on the run from Absalom who is seeking to kill David
2. When David fled Jerusalem, he took refuge in the city of Mahanaim where he made his headquarters
3. From there, he sends his men out to battle, but with explicit instructions not to harm Absalom (READ 18:1-6):
  - a. David divides his men into three divisions under the leadership of Joab, Abishai and Ittai
  - b. He intended to go out to battle with them but is convinced to stay back at the city
  - c. He gave explicit instructions to Joab, Abishai and Ittai to "**deal gently**" with his son, Absalom, and did so in the presence of all the soldiers
4. David's men defeat Israel in a bitter battle with 20,000 men dying (READ 18:6-8)
5. Joab and his men deliberately violate David's command and execute Absalom (READ 18:9-18):
  - a. Absalom gets his head caught in tree branches and is suspended in midair, possibly because of his thick hair (see 14:25-26)
  - b. The captain that found Absalom refused to kill him:
    - 1) He refused to go against David's wishes
    - 2) He also knew that if he had killed Absalom and David found out, Joab would have feigned ignorance of the matter
  - c. So, Joab took matters into his own hands, and in direct disobedience to David's command killed Absalom, dumped his body in to a deep pit in the forest, and buried him under a pile of stones
6. In spite of David's desire to exercise mercy, it appears God had other plans for Absalom which involved His divine judgment and this is captured in three images:

- a. The first image is Absalom hanging in a tree:
  - 1) The imagery is eerily reflective of another passage (READ Deuteronomy 21: 22-23)
  - 2) According to the Law, Absalom was a cursed man:
    - a) The Law says that one who dishonors his father or mother is cursed: **“Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother. And all the people shall say Amen”** (Deuteronomy 27:16)
    - b) It also says the one who lies with his father’s wife is cursed: **“Cursed is he who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s skirt. And all the people shall say Amen”** (Deuteronomy 27:20)
    - c) Absalom was guilty of both of these and more
  
- b. The second image is Absalom being thrown into a deep pit (17a):
  - 1) The pit often represents God’s judgment, devastation, destruction and despair (Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah and Zechariah all use it this way)
  - 2) In the Psalms David even likens Hell (sheol) to a pit
  
- c. The third image is Absalom being buried under a pile of stones (17b)—this is striking because according to the Law, the penalty for incorrigible rebellion against one’s father and mother was death by stoning (READ Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

<p><b>B. David grieves Absalom’s death (18:19-33 &amp; 19:4)</b></p>
--

1. Two men, Ahimaaz (son of Zadok the priest) and an unnamed Cushite, rush to deliver the news of the victory over Israel’s army (READ 18:19-23)
2. David is anxiously waiting between the inner and outer gates of the city, wishing and hoping for **“good news”** (READ 18:24-27):
  - a. Now initially, one would suspect that David is nervously waiting to hear how his army has done against the much more numerous and powerful army of Israel and would rejoice when he learns of the victory
  - b. However, when the runners both arrive with the exiting news, we see David apparently disregard the news (or at least not respond to it) and seeks information only regarding his son—he asks the same question of each:
    - 1) Ahimaaz arrives first (READ 28-30)
    - 2) The Cushite arrives (READ 31-32)
  
3. David is devastated by Absalom’s death and the only way to describe his grief is with words like anguish or despair; he was despondent and inconsolable (READ 18:33 & 19:4):
  - a. The NASB and others say that David was **“deeply moved”** but a more literal rendering is that he began to tremble or shake
  - b. He not only **“covered his face”** with his hands and wept, but he **“cried out with a loud voice”** repeating the name of his son over and over, **“O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!”**
  - c. He wished he had died instead of Absalom: **“Would I had died instead of you...”**
  - d. The text also says that he ultimately isolated himself in his own house above the gate (and apparently in view of the city)
  - e. We can certainly understand David’s grief and mourning, especially those who have ever suffered the loss of a child

### C. Joab confronts David (19:1-8)

1. This is where the passage takes a turn and poses some questions which are difficult to answer
2. David's public display of grief had troubling impact on his men returning from battle (READ 19:1-3):
  - a. They had just defeated an enemy who significantly outnumbered them and should have found a city celebrating the great victory and awaiting their return
  - b. They should have found their king waiting at the gate to welcome them with praise and congratulations
  - c. What they found instead was a king who was weeping and mourning Absalom's death and had isolated himself in his own house
  - d. The text tells us that the "**victory**" (literally "salvation") of that day was "**turned to mourning for all the people**"
  - e. Even more disturbing is v. 3: "**So the people (e.g. David's soldiers) went by stealth into the city that day, as people who are humiliated steal away when they flee in battle.**"
3. When Joab learns of David's behavior, he went to David's house and confronts him (READ 19:5):
  - a. He accused David of shaming the very men who had risked their lives and saved him and his family
  - b. He accused him of "**loving those who hate you [Absalom] and hating those who love you [his men]**"
  - c. He accused him of caring nothing for his men, and that he would be pleased if all his men were killed but Absalom were still alive
  - d. He warned David that if David didn't go down and encourage his men, they would all abandon him

### Conclusion

1. This poses some difficult questions for us:
  - a. The first of which is, was David wrong to mourn the death of Absalom the way he did?
  - b. Was the response from David's men appropriate? Were they more concerned about being celebrated than recognizing that even though Absalom was a wicked man, he was the king's son?
  - c. Was Joab right in rebuking David, especially when he seemed to show no compassion or empathy for David's loss?
  - d. The answer to each of these questions is likely both yes and no:
    - 1) Is wasn't wrong for David to mourn his son's death, but maybe he should have tried a bit harder to acknowledge his brave men and the victory and safety they secured for he and his family
    - 2) Maybe the response of his soldiers was appropriate seeing as they had risked their own lives for the sake of David, but could they have offered up understanding and compassion to David?
    - 3) When it comes to Joab, maybe his words rang true, but we must remember that none of this would have happened had he not disobeyed the direct order of his king and murdered Absalom

2. However, if we stopped here we'd miss what I believe are two important lessons we find in the text, and they both have to do with the Gospel:
  - a. The first is that God is grieved when He has to judge sinners, and He would much prefer to exercise mercy:
    - 1) Throughout our study of 2 Samuel we have reflected on the fact that David serves as a type of Christ, which means that he serves as an image or representation of our Savior
    - 2) I mentioned in the introduction that this passage presents us with tension—that between God's righteous need to judge sin and His desire to extend mercy
    - 3) When it comes to Absalom, we see God's judgment—he was a wicked man that ultimately paid the price for His sin and was judged by God
    - 4) When it comes to David, we see him wanting to express mercy toward Absalom when the passage first started, but then experience anguish and grief when His son is ultimately judged and put to death
    - 5) Can you see how David's responses models those of our Heavenly Father and Savior Jesus Christ?
    - 6) This reminds me of something we read in Genesis 6:5-8 (READ) which occurs right before God announces the Flood—we see in this God's righteous judgment, His grief in doing so, and His desire to exercise mercy (e.g. saving Noah and his family)
    - 7) It also reminds me of something we studied back in 2 Peter 3:9—that God has not returned for almost 2000 years not because He's slow, but because He is patient with mankind, not wanting them to perish but to come to repentance—in other words, God desires mercy over judgment!
    - 8) This is the Gospel and is described beautiful by Paul in Titus 3:4-7 (READ)
  - b. The second lesson is this: maybe the reason David and Joab responded differently is because David had experienced God's mercy himself and Joab didn't.
    - 1) David desired to extend mercy to Absalom and grieved when he was judged because he had been shown mercy by God
    - 2) Joab took vengeance on Absalom and rebuked David when he grieved because he knew nothing of God's mercy (by his own choice)
    - 3) We of all people should understand God's mercy since we have experienced it first hand, and should be grieved just as He does when others face His judgment

Some Christians' rejoicing over Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death or claiming that she got what she deserves now that she is facing God