

Second Samuel Chapter 14 - John Karmelich

All of us who have children know what it's like to battle between "justice versus grace". I realize all of us love our children no matter what, even when they mess up! If memory's correct, I believe to hold an office as a judge in modern Israel one must have children, as that country figures a judge understands a battle between compassion and justice and how to best resolve such issues. To state what should be an obvious fact, by now, I believe that's why this chapter is here. The chapter deals with the saga between David and his oldest son Absalom. We'll discover in the next chapter he leads a nationwide rebellion to become the king instead of David. In fact, there's an Israel tradition for fathers and sons to throw rocks at an Absalom monument (which is only a few centuries old by best guess) because he rebelled against his father David. As I preach the bible is not here to teach us ancient history. It is to give us lessons on how God wants us to live as a witness for Him. One of the toughest things most of us must deal with in life is rebellion by our children (or other family, etc.). The great question is how does God expect us to deal with such situations! If you get a few pointers on that, then it'd be worth the few minutes I ask you to study this little lesson with the goal of learning what God's will is in tough situations! Let's begin:

The chapter notices by stating the fact David "misses" having his oldest son Absalom around. The idea can refer to affection or simply the fact David realizes Absalom is next in line to be the king. He killed his half-brother in anger over raping his sister, so there's justification to kill him, but the Bible does not say it's the death penalty. This is David's dilemma both as a father and Israel's head judge for the nation (so to speak). The head of the army (Joab) knows David's wrestling with this, so he takes matters in his own hands. Joab has a woman pretend to be desolate as he concocts a story for her to tell David. What I pondered is why does the bible want us to know all the details of this fake story instead of just saying, "A made up story was told to convince David to bring his son back in his life!" I just figured life often works that way. We hear stories and we're not sure what to believe. We pray for His guidance and try to make the best decisions we can with the information at hand.

Anyway, much of the chapter is a woman dressed up as if she is desolate and Joab instructs her to tell a story exactly as they plan it. In short, she's to say, "I have two sons. One killed the other. Now people want to kill the other son for that crime." It was roughly similar to what Absalom did to his brother but different enough to where David wouldn't catch on. The funny part is near the end of her story, David's question is whether or not Joab put her up to it. Don't know why David had that suspicion. I suspect he saw Joab doing strange things or maybe he said "yes" or "perfect" out loud. Anyway, when the jig was up, the woman admitted Joab put her up to it. At the same time, the woman told David the reason all of this was done is because everyone knew Absalom was next in line, and it was time to bring the feud to an end once and for all. However, the saga doesn't end there.

David decides that Absalom can return to Jerusalem but not see his father! I guess David's still nervous about public perception over the whole thing. (By the way we'll discover in the next chapter Absalom's a "bad egg" so to speak but we'll deal with that in the next lesson!) Speaking of the "bad egg", we read he was popular and good looking. Of all things, he only got a haircut once a year and weighed how the amount of hair that was cut! And you thought we had an ego! The reason the bible is telling us that, is to set us up for the next chapter when he organizes a national rebellion against David. We also learn of his three sons and one daughter who was named after his "raped" sister. Later in the book we learn that Absalom "didn't have sons" when he died, so most suspect his three sons all died young.

Anyway, the story isn't over yet. Absalom is ticked off he can't see his father. He throws a tantrum by setting Joab's farmland on fire to get his attention. When Absalom explained why, he said either let me

see dad or kill me on the spot! Bottom line the chapter ends with David kissing Absalom and that's the end of the chapter. Obviously, the chapter must be read in context of the surround chapters. Absalom is going to lead a national rebellion against David so obviously having Absalom there will be an issue!

The question to ponder is did David make the right decision bringing him back? Obviously, Absalom's David's son plus he was next in line to be the king. Most of us would probably do anything for the sake of our children. The question is when our children do something wrong how do we balance justice and forgiveness? Realize God doesn't forgive our sins, but He Himself (Jesus) pays for them! Anyway, the issue is how does David deal with this! He hasn't suffered yet for what his son did, but I'm positive that he knew it was related to his martial affair probably many years ago at this point. Realize Solomon was alive and saw all this! I'm not sure there is a perfect solution. David could legally have Absalom killed for what he did and David's two-year delay of forgiving him doesn't excuse Absalom's rebellion that is described in the next chapter.

As most of us know, sometimes we must be tough with our children to teach them right from wrong. I know David kept him away for a few years, but all that did was get Absalom "ticked off". What I'd do is probably tell Absalom you're banished for "x" more years for the setting the field on fire thing. Yes, I am sure David loved him but the challenge is to balance grace and justice. I'm convinced that David's love for Absalom blinded his eyes about the danger he was going to face because of him.

This is one of those chapters with no perfect answer. It gives us stuff to think about when we're forced to make a tough decision. Of course, none of our situations will ever be exactly like this. That's why it is necessary to pray for God's guidance and then make the best decisions we can given the information we have in hand. If there's a lesson for us here, it's to do the right thing even when it involves dealing with our own family. OK, enough lecturing for one lesson. Thanks for reading!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! If you'd like you can read the rest or stop now. Either way, I'm grateful for you reading this. To see the other one, click on one of the two links on this web page. Thanks again, John