

# BETWEEN THE GATES

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:  
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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2 Samuel 18:1–19:43  
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*2 Samuel 18:1–19:43*

I'm a father. But I'm also a follower of Jesus. I naturally think about what I want for my children. I don't as naturally think about what Jesus wants for them—or about the larger concerns of the kingdom of God. Sometimes, I feel caught in the middle, between my role as a father and my role as a disciple, pulled in two directions.

David was a father. But he was also a king. He had to think not only about what he wanted for his son but also about what God wanted for him—and about the larger concerns of the kingdom of God. He was caught in the middle, pulled in two directions.

Is there a way to resolve the tension that we feel as parents? The story of David's fraught relationship with his son Absalom will help us.

The narrative is particularly applicable to parents, but everyone can relate to it, because we all have, or have had, parents, and we all know parents. Also, as a narrative about a father and a son, it foreshadows the relationship between the Father and the Son. In particular, it helps us understand not only what the Son endured for us but also what the Father endured for us.

## Tentative marching orders

**2 Samuel 18:1-5:**

**Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. 2 And David sent out the army, one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the men, "I myself will also go out with you." 3 But the men said, "You shall not go out. For if we flee, they will not care about us. If half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore it is better that**

**you send us help from the city." 4 The king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do." So the king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. 5 And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.**

When he had sent Joab into battle against Ammon, though it was "the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle," David "remained at Jerusalem." Instead of going to war, as would be expected, David stayed home, whereupon he violated Bathsheba, setting off a chain of events that led to the rebellion of his son Absalom (2 Samuel 11:1-5). This time he intends on going into battle with Joab and the other commanders. The commanders, though, convince David that he's too valuable and that he would better serve the cause by remaining behind—not to look down from his roof, of course, which he did when he ogled Bathsheba, but to manage affairs from behind the lines in Mahanaim.

By stating his intention to go into battle, is David showing that he has learned from his sin? Perhaps. But one of his reasons, perhaps his only reason, for wanting to go into battle is to make sure that no harm comes to Absalom. If he can't be there, then he instructs Joab and the other commanders to "deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." The last time David sent Joab into battle, he instructed him not to protect an enemy but to arrange for the death of one of his own: Uriah (2 Samuel 11:15). In that case, of course, David was attempting to cover his tracks: he had impregnated Bathsheba and wanted her husband dead.

David seems more concerned with the fate of his son than he does with the fate of his army. He doesn't express concern for his army; he wants something done for "my sake." David never could bring himself to reprimand or discipline Absalom for the murder of Amnon, and he can't even stomach the thought of his son's death even though he has led a rebellion against him.

David's instructions to his commanders must have had a deflating effect on his troops, who were listening in. How do you tell an army to hold back? If an army holds back, doesn't it risk being defeated? These are rather tentative marching orders.

Why does David—indeed, why do parents—coddle their children and refuse to discipline them? Why are they overprotective? Why do they indulge their children? David gives away his motivation with two words: “my sake.” This isn't primarily about Absalom and what's good for him. This is primarily about David and what's good for him, or at least what David thinks is good for him. For parents who indulge their children, who are overly attached to their children, who live vicariously through their children, reprimanding and disciplining them feels as if they are bringing harm to themselves.

So, what comes of Absalom?

## Between heaven and earth

### 2 Samuel 18:6-18:

**So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. 7 And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. 8 The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword.**

**9 And Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. 10 And a certain man saw it and told Joab, “Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.” 11 Joab said to the man who told him, “What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt.” 12 But the man said to Joab, “Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king's son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, ‘For my sake protect the young man Absalom.’ 13 On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you**

**yourself would have stood aloof.” 14 Joab said, “I will not waste time like this with you.” And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak. 15 And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him.**

**16 Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained them. 17 And they took Absalom and threw him into a great pit in the forest and raised over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled every one to his own home. 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, “I have no son to keep my name in remembrance.” He called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's monument to this day.**

David's troops defeat Absalom's troops, aided by the Lord, who, unlike David, is concerned for righteousness and therefore intended to “bring harm upon Absalom” (2 Samuel 17:14). Even the trees are pictured as fighting against Absalom's men. One of the trees, in fact, proves to be Absalom's undoing. Absalom's head gets stuck in an oak, and his mule leaves him behind. Absalom loses his royal mount, not to mention the kingdom. He's left “suspended between heaven and earth.” Having refused to serve heaven's purposes, Absalom is unable to rule on earth. In scholar Jan Fokkelman's words, Absalom is a “nowhere man.”<sup>1</sup>

But doesn't Absalom's plight also represent that of David? Isn't David also suspended between heaven and earth—heaven's desire for righteousness and earth's desire that a man not be harmed? Indeed, David is suspended between his role as king and his role as a father.

The man who happens upon Absalom feels as if he's in a no-win situation. If he kills Absalom, he violates David's wishes, and he has no confidence that Joab will stand up for him before David. If he refuses to kill Absalom, he earns the wrath of Joab. The man chooses the latter. Joab takes it upon himself to impale Absalom, and Joab's armor-bearers finish the job. Absalom had built a monument to himself because he wanted to be remembered, but instead of being honored in his death, he is tossed into a pit in the forest—the forest, which was his undoing.

The king's son is dead. Who's going to tell him?

## Between the gates

2 Samuel 18:19-32:

Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Let me run and carry news to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the hand of his enemies." 20 And Joab said to him, "You are not to carry news today. You may carry news another day, but today you shall carry no news, because the king's son is dead." 21 Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran. 22 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?" 23 "Come what may," he said, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and outran the Cushite.

24 Now David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he lifted up his eyes and looked, he saw a man running alone. 25 The watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he drew nearer and nearer. 26 The watchman saw another man running. And the watchman called to the gate and said, "See, another man running alone!" The king said, "He also brings news." 27 The watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man and comes with good news."

28 Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." 29 And the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was." 30 And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still.

31 And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king! For the Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." 32

**The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man."**

Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok the priest, an experienced messenger, wants to tell David the good news, especially inasmuch as he conveyed not-so-good news not long after Absalom marched on Jerusalem (2 Samuel 15:27, 17:17-22). Joab knows, however, that David may not take kindly to news of his son's death. In fact, David ordered the death of a previous messenger who thought that he was carrying good news that wasn't received as such (2 Samuel 1:1-16). On the other hand, Joab probably wants a messenger who will give David the straight scoop, come what may. From his perspective, Cushite, a foreigner without emotional ties, is the man for the job. Ahimaaz, though, promises to hold nothing back, "come what may," so Joab dispatches him also.

David is sitting "between the two gates," hoping for good news. In David's case, he sits between his role as king and his role as father. He discerns before Ahimaaz reaches him that he bears good news. But what sort of news, from David's perspective, qualifies as good? Normally, victory qualifies as good news. Normally, the death of the leader of your enemy qualifies as good news. But what if the leader is your son?

Ahimaaz reaches the king first and reports the victory, but when David asks about Absalom, he freezes, perhaps realizing at last, in view of David's question and countenance, that he will not take kindly to news of his son's death. The Cushite, though also careful, is forthcoming enough to get the point across: Absalom is dead.

Parents, like David, sometimes feel suspended between heaven and earth: a heavenly concern for righteousness and an earthly concern for their children to feel no pain. Or, to use another metaphor, parents sit between the gates, between what they want for their children and what God wants for them, between what they want for them and the larger concerns of the kingdom of God. Parents who indulge their children invariably favor earthly concerns and what they want for their children.

How does David react? It's good news, right?

## Good news or bad news?

2 Samuel 18:33:

**And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”**

Both Ahimaaz and the Cushite addressed “the king,” but only a father was listening. David reacts not at all to the news of victory. News of Absalom’s death, however, devastates him. If David had been listening as a king, he never would have wished for his death in the place of Absalom, which would leave a man who despises God to lead God’s people.

Earlier, when he instructed his commanders to deal gently with Absalom, he referred to him as a “young man.” Finally, he refers to Absalom as his son. In fact, the words gush out of him. He calls Absalom “my son” five times in two sentences. His words capture all that could have been and all that is not. What a tragic, pathetic scene!

The death of Absalom, and David’s reaction to it, marks David’s failure as a father. He failed to discipline Absalom and, having failed to discipline him, he failed to reconcile with him, for apart from confronting sin, there is no restoration.

The death of Absalom also marks David’s failure as a king, not only in view of his present inability to celebrate his army’s victory but also in view of his past dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah, which set in motion a chain of events that culminated in both the rebellion of Absalom and the death of Absalom.

David’s instructions to Joab and his other commanders regarding Absalom contrast with his instructions to Joab regarding Uriah. David instructed Joab to deal gently with Absalom, but these were his instructions regarding Uriah: “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die” (2 Samuel 11:15). David’s reaction to the death of Absalom also contrasts with his reaction to the death of Uriah and to the death of other faithful warriors. David lamented the death of Absalom, but when he heard of Uriah’s death and the deaths of other warriors, he sent this message to Joab: “Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another” (2 Samuel 11:25).

David reacted not at all when “the sword devoured” the troops of his enemy, but he shrugged off the death of his warriors, and particularly the death of Uriah, by observing that “the sword devours one and now another.” To David, the death of his faithful warriors, especially the death of one particular warrior, was good news, and the death of his rebellious son is such bad news that it overshadows the victory of his faithful warriors.

The prophet Nathan told David that because of his dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah, “the sword shall never depart from your house” (2 Samuel 12:10). The death of Absalom constitutes divine judgment for the death of Uriah.

We’d like to keep our children from making the same mistakes that we have made and are making—if in fact we acknowledge our mistakes—but sin has its consequences, as we have seen in the David story. Sometimes, though God forgives us, our children follow in our footsteps despite our efforts to point them in another direction. The apple, as they say, doesn’t fall far from the tree, even if the tree tries to kick the apple away.

Parents like David who coddle and indulge their children are deaf to the larger concerns of the kingdom of God because they listen only as parents. They put their fraught relationship with their children before their relationship with God.

David is spiraling down. Can anyone pull him out?

## Overstating the case

2 Samuel 19:1-8a:

**It was told Joab, “Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” 2 So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, “The king is grieving for his son.” 3 And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. 4 The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, “O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!” 5 Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, “You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, 6 because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you,**

**for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. 7 Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now.” 8 Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, “Behold, the king is sitting in the gate.” And all the people came before the king.**

David, by allowing the death of his traitorous son to overshadow the victory of his warriors, has managed to turn victory into defeat, dragging down his people with him. The people, in fact, react as if they've lost. David has placed the kingdom in jeopardy by identifying too greatly with his son.

Joab takes it upon himself to rebuke David, even if he overstates his case. There is no evidence that David hates those who love him, nor is there evidence that he would be pleased if all his people were dead. It is not likely that no man would stay with David or that it would be worse for him than all the evil that has ever come upon him if he does not make a public appearance. Nevertheless, David has neglected his responsibility as king, shaming those who have risked their lives for him.

Even if Joab overstates the case, David receives Joab's rebuke, just as he received the rebuke of Shimei, even though he was innocent of Shimei's accusations (2 Samuel 16:5-14). Perhaps Joab needed to overstate the case in order to pull David out of his downward spiral and step up to his responsibilities. In any event, David takes his place not “between the two gates,” as if between his roles as king and father, but “in the gate,” in his role as king. Note that the narrator uses the word “king” three times in verse 8. David acts like a king again, and the people now come before the king in the gate.

Parents who are overly attached to their children often drag others down because they lose sight of other people. They're not rearing children to bless the world; they're rearing children to use the world. Moreover, such parents, who think they're serving their children's best interests, are in fact doing them no favors. Such children often grow up believing that the world revolves around them. When the world doesn't do their bidding, they don't know what to do.

## **Discipline your children**

Parents who are followers of Christ are first of all followers of Christ and second of all parents. They strive to see themselves as parents in God's kingdom, not their kingdom. Our children do not exist for our sakes. They don't even exist for their sakes. We exist and they exist for God's sake and for the sake of his kingdom.

If parents find themselves suspended between a heavenly concern for righteousness and an earthly concern for their children to feel no pain, they must reach for heaven. If they sit between gates, between what they want for their children and what God wants for them, they must lean toward what God wants. If we protect our children from pain, we may be protecting them from God, who wants to form them through pain. Hasn't God formed us through pain? In the parent gate, you may want to protect your children from pain. In the disciple gate, you may want God to form your children through pain.

Parents who are followers of Jesus learn to value their relationship with God above their relationship with their children. They become attentive not simply as parents but also, more importantly, as followers of Jesus. What might be considered bad news to some parents could be good news for parents who listen with kingdom ears. Or, what might be considered good news to some parents could be bad news for parents who listen with kingdom ears.

Paul E. Miller, the author of *A Praying Life*, found out that one of his children was considering a career that would make him wealthy. Good news, right? Not for Miller. He “broke out into a sweat.” He observes, “There is absolutely nothing wrong with earning a lot of money; I'm just keenly aware of what wealth can do to your soul.”<sup>2</sup> I have two school age children, and Miller's words were like Joab's rebuke to me. Parents who follow Jesus are concerned mostly for the children's souls.

What then do we do as followers of Jesus, as parents in the kingdom of God? We discipline them. Yes, we discipline them, but for what purpose?

Followers of Jesus don't discipline their children so that they may have successful careers and make a lot of money. They don't discipline their children primarily so that they may behave better. The heavenly goal of discipline, according to the writer of Hebrews, is “holiness,” that children may know and follow Jesus

(Hebrews 12:10). Misbehavior not only calls forth the need for better behavior but also for the forgiveness that Jesus offers. God is not interested primarily in better behavior; he's interested in character formation that is wrought in a relationship with his Son.

I've gone to parenting seminars and tried to read parenting books and employed different approaches with my children. In the end, I've concluded that what method one uses (corporal punishment, timeouts, take a break, go to your room, loss of privileges, grounding) isn't as important as that one uses some method. Whatever you do, do something. And strive for consistency.

When I find myself sitting between the gates, so to speak, between what I want for my children and what God wants for them, I remind myself that I do my children no favors if I give them a pass. Nor am I doing those they come in contact any favors, for those who think the world revolves around them don't live for the sake of blessing others.

David, after violating Bathsheba and arranging for the death of Uriah, may have held himself back from reprimanding and disciplining his children because he felt compromised. But that's no excuse. Andy Burnham, one of our pastors, confesses to having been a stoned-out hippy. When he was warning one of his children about drug use, the child said, "Dad, you're hypocrite." Andy answered, "If I was still using I'd be a hypocrite. As it is, I'm an expert." Andy didn't back off.

David, having put down the rebellion, now faces a fractured nation.

## Uniting the tribes

### 2 Samuel 19:8b-43:

Now Israel had fled every man to his own home. 9 And all the people were arguing throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. 10 But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?"

11 And King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests: "Say to the elders of Judah, 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house, when the word of all Israel has come to the king? 12 You

are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?' 13 And say to Amasa, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me and more also, if you are not commander of my army from now on in place of Joab.'" 14 And he swayed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, "Return, both you and all your servants." 15 So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan.

16 And Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, from Bahurim, hurried to come down with the men of Judah to meet King David. 17 And with him were a thousand men from Benjamin. And Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and his twenty servants, rushed down to the Jordan before the king, 18 and they crossed the ford to bring over the king's household and to do his pleasure. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan, 19 and said to the king, "Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. Do not let the king take it to heart. 20 For your servant knows that I have sinned. Therefore, behold, I have come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king." 21 Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?" 22 But David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?" 23 And the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king gave him his oath.

24 And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. He had neither taken care of his feet nor trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in safety. 25 And when he came to Jerusalem to meet the king, the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" 26 He answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me, for your servant said to him, 'I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go with the king.' For your servant is lame. 27 He has slandered your servant to my lord the

king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you. 28 For all my father's house were but men doomed to death before my lord the king, but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to cry to the king?" 29 And the king said to him, "Why speak any more of your affairs? I have decided: you and Ziba shall divide the land." 30 And Mephibosheth said to the king, "Oh, let him take it all, since my lord the king has come safely home."

31 Now Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim, and he went on with the king to the Jordan, to escort him over the Jordan. 32 Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. 33 And the king said to Barzillai, "Come over with me, and I will provide for you with me in Jerusalem." 34 But Barzillai said to the king, "How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? 35 I am this day eighty years old. Can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? 36 Your servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king. Why should the king repay me with such a reward? 37 Please let your servant return, that I may die in my own city near the grave of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham. Let him go over with my lord the king, and do for him whatever seems good to you." 38 And the king answered, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do for him whatever seems good to you, and all that you desire of me I will do for you." 39 Then all the people went over the Jordan, and the king went over. And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own home. 40 The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. All the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel, brought the king on his way.

41 Then all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, "Why have our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan,

and all David's men with him?" 42 All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king is our close relative. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?" 43 And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, "We have ten shares in the king, and in David also we have more than you. Why then did you despise us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?" But the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

After Absalom's rebellion, David now faces the challenge of uniting the north and south in Israel again. First, the northern tribes argue about whether they should unite around David (verses 9-10). However, David turns his attention first to the south, to the elders of Judah, the tribe he hails from (verses 11-15). Then he turns his attention to certain key individuals from the north (verses 16-40). Despite his efforts, the old division between north and south has resurfaced, and David, at this point in his life, can't repair the breach (verses 39-43). David has been weakened by a series of failings, culminating in his inability to put the kingdom of God before his fraught relationship with his son. It will take a stronger king than David to unite the tribes.

## A stronger king

There is such a king. He's not just strong enough to unite the tribes of Israel; he's also strong enough to unite the whole world. His name, of course, is Jesus. David, in both his strengths and weaknesses, foreshadows the coming of Jesus, called the Son of David because of his descent from David. Where David was weak, Jesus is strong. Where David was strong, Jesus is stronger. In this story, however, Jesus is also foreshadowed, in a backward sort of way, by Absalom. Absalom was after all, the son of David.

Both Absalom and Jesus hung from a tree. Whereas Absalom was deprived of his royal mount, the tree that Jesus hung from is pictured by the apostle John as a throne. Both Absalom and Jesus were suspended between heaven and earth. Whereas Absalom refused to serve heaven's purposes and was therefore unable to rule on earth, Jesus united heaven and earth and now reigns over all creation. Absalom, hanging from a tree, was pierced by Joab. Jesus, hanging from a tree, was pierced by a Roman soldier.

The price of restoration in 2 Samuel is the death of a son. The price of restoration in the New Testament is the death of the Son: the Son of God. The death of a son in 1 Samuel is described as “good news,” though the father who hears of it doesn’t receive it as such. The death of the Son in the New Testament is described as the good news.

And what does the Father feel about the death of the Son, his only Son?

## The Father keeps his distance

We might imagine that the Father, like David, sitting between the gates, so to speak, between his role as Father and his role as King.

When his Son is being crucified, the Father keeps his distance, apparently because he must, as his Son takes on the sins of the world. But he makes his feelings known: he darkens creation, he tears the veil of the temple, and he shakes the land. However, he does not speak. Earlier, he spoke: when his Son was baptized and when his Son was transfigured. In each case, he said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17, 17:5). When his Son is crucified, how does he not say anything? Again, we might imagine that he can’t speak as his Son suffers for our sins, but again, he makes his feelings known. He leaves it to a Roman soldier to speak for him: “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

Behind the scenes, in some heavenly chamber, maybe he’s covering his face, weeping, and crying with a loud voice, “O my Son Jesus, my Son, my Son Jesus! Would I had died instead of you, O Jesus, my Son, my Son! Oh my Son Jesus, O Jesus, my Son, my Son!”

When the Son, hanging from nails hammered into his hands and feet, suspended between heaven and earth, cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” how in God’s name does the Father hold himself back? (Matthew 27:46) How does he not come to his Son’s rescue? There’s only one possible answer.

He holds himself back for us, so that our sins could be forgiven and that we could be restored to him. Between the two gates, though it must tear him apart, just as the veil was torn apart, he walks over and takes his seat as King, and he does so for our sake.

Now, as Ahimaaz said to David, the Father says to us: “All is well.”

Good news, right?

Tell your children. And everyone else for that matter

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 1, King David* (The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, Assen / Maastricht, 1986), 242.

<sup>2</sup> Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress), 138.