

Celebrate, Don't Mourn A Victory

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 August 1988

Preacher: Harry Robinson

- [0 : 00] Our God, we come before you in all the varying circumstances of our lives. Sometimes with the doubts that afflict our hearts. Sometimes with the joy we can't explain.
- Sometimes with burdens we don't understand. Sometimes in an arrogance and self-centeredness that makes us deaf to all that you might have to say. Because you are the God who knows the heart of each one of us.
- And you are the God who has given us your word written. Will you take your written word and our differing hearts.
- And speak by your word to the needs of our hearts. In Christ's name, Amen. Amen. The passage that we're looking at this morning, and this is a series that's been going on all summer.
- And it's found in 2 Samuel chapter 18, verse 24 to 33. And it's hard not to summarize the whole of 1 and 2 Samuel to begin this sermon.
- [1 : 15] But let me just tell you briefly. David is now an old man. He has aspiring sons who want to take his throne. One of them died mysteriously.
- We don't know how. One of them was murdered by his brother. The third now, by the name of Absalom, is making a violent attempt to raise a coup against King David.
- And to put him from the throne and put him to death. He's done this in an amazing way by gathering the hearts of the people of Israel.
- Collecting them under the pretenses of doing his religious duties at Hebron. And there he brings together a great force who are now attacking David as this passage opens.
- Absalom has been killed. The revolt has broken. But David does not yet know. And so in chapter 18 and verse 24, it begins, David was sitting between the two gates and watching by the wall.
- [2 : 29] Now what had happened? He was in this city across the Jordan. He was a refugee from his own son. He had sent out his three great generals, split his army in three among them, and kept only a small reserve with himself.
- They had gone out of the city, down towards the great forest that was before them, and they had disappeared into the forest. And David is sitting alone in the gate, watching the forest to see who's coming out of it.
- And as he watches the forest to see who's coming out of it, one of the watchmen who stands by looks from the roof of the gatehouse and says, I see a man running alone.
- And David says, if he is alone, there are tidings in his mouth. David anticipated that perhaps the whole of the armies that he had sent out would be rushing out of the forest in defeat, fleeing from the enemy.
- And so he was greatly relieved to see just one man coming. As the watchman observes the forest and the man coming, he sees a second man running, but he too is alone.
- [3 : 58] The army is not in flight, as he might have suspected. And they recognized the first man as Ahimeaz, who was the son of Zadok the priest.

And David says, he is a good man. He will bring good tidings. And so David sits there alone and watches this man work his way towards the city, the end of this marathon run from where the armies were engaged.

And he waits, wondering what the news is. And when Ahimeaz comes to him, he cries out, as soon as he is within earshot, all is well.

He comes and bows before his king with his face to the earth. He says, blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king.

And David says, is it well with the young man Absalom? And Ahimeaz doesn't answer, but says, when Joab sent your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I do not know what it was.

[5 : 12] He wasn't going to be the bearer of bad news to the king. And so they waited for the second runner, Akushite, who is nameless. And he came and he cried out, good tidings for my lord the king, for the lord has delivered you this day from the power of all who rose up against him.

And the king said to the Akushite, is it well with the young man Absalom, my son? And Akushite answered, may the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man.

And the king was deeply moved and went to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he wept, he said, oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would I have died instead of you?

Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. It's a very poignant picture of a father whose heart is broken because this son, whose purpose that day was to murder his father, had instead been murdered, been put to death by Joab, the commander of the king's forces.

And David went into deep mourning. Well, there's a lot of old men in this congregation.

[6 : 55] I don't mean you, of course. I mean, I mean some of the others. And the idea of sitting and waiting and watching and waiting for the news to come, waiting for the good news, because it is good news that's coming.

There is built right into the word, tidings, that they are good tidings. And David is waiting for a word that will tell him what has happened.

And when the word comes, he is desperately hurt at the news of the death of his son. His son, who was beautiful beyond all men, who was perfect from the tip of his head to the soles of his feet, who rode in a chariot through the streets of Jerusalem with 50 runners beside him, who won the hearts of all the people of the Hebrews, all the Israelites turned to him.

He stole their hearts from his father, King David. And yet his father loved him. And... couldn't understand what had happened.

David had been put to death against his expressed wishes to all the commanders of his army. Well, the thing that impresses me about this story, and this is why I want to talk to you, is that maybe the issues for you are like sitting in the gate and looking at the forest and wondering whether you're going to see the evidences of ultimate defeat or the good news come out of the forest.

[9 : 00] And you watch and you wait and you don't know whether you want to hear what's going to come. You don't know whether you want to hear the tidings.

Because if the tidings are that the armies of David have won, then what will have happened to Absalom? And if the tidings are that the armies of Absalom have won, then what's going to happen to David?

He waits, very ambivalent, about the message that's going to come. And... You know what I think this perhaps helps us to understand?

Because the function of the Old Testament is to help us understand the new. is that we are a people who perhaps individually have spent a lot of our time waiting for the tidings to come, the good news to come.

And by the time we hear them, we're very ambivalent about them. Because if they're right, and if they are good news, then much of our life has been wasted.

[10 : 13] Much of what we'd hoped for, much of what we'd dreamed of, much of our plans for ourselves are wasted because our life doesn't count against the reality of God's victory in Christ.

And so we're ambivalent. I think that's why people are a little bit afraid of the church and find it a kind of place of mourning. It's the place you go to when everything else fails.

And it's the place you go to when there are no other options open to you. As long as you can run your own life in your own way, then you don't need any interference.

You don't have to wait for the news to come. You are self-sufficient. But someday, the message has to come.

And when the message comes, what will be our capacity to hear it? Will it come like a kind of death knell striking in our hearts, realizing the game is over, it's all finished, our ambitions are done, our hopes and aspirations prove to be futile, meaningless, frivolous, without purpose.

[11 : 34] But you see, a great victory is announced here. And this victory, David was not able to appropriate because in the midst of this victory, he suffered a terrible personal loss.

Something which was very close to his heart was denied to him when the news of the victory came. And I suspect that something very close to your heart and mine is denied to us when the news of the victory comes to us.

The news of the victory which God has won in Christ puts an end to our own selfish ambitions and desires and hopes. Absalom stood for everything that David dreamed of.

this was to be the man who was to be the king and to be his successor. Beautiful, magnificent in his way with people, a born leader as David saw him, and yet not the anointed of the Lord, and one whose purposes were evil and whose power and pride were arrogant beyond belief.

Yet David was blind to all that and saw the kingdom being fulfilled in his son, Absalom. And you see, we hear the gospel the same way.

[13 : 01] We often hear it as bad news because we hear it as God's purpose. And in God's purpose, our purpose might well be lost.

Our worldly ambitions and desires, our hopes, our aspirations might well be lost in the thing which God has done. And so instead of rejoicing at the victory which God has won for us in Jesus Christ, we go from church mourning because if God is right and if the victory that has been won for us by Jesus Christ on the cross is the ultimate and eternal victory of God over the powers of evil than we who are so compromised with evil, who are so much involved in the world, who have our own petty ambitions and desires, all those are taken away from us and smashed because there is a far greater victory in which God wants us to be involved.

So you get the picture of David in mourning and the soldiers who had been out fighting in his name against his enemies all day come back to the city in the night and they find instead of a great celebration and a great festival and great happiness and great joy, they find a city in mourning because of that victory which has been won.

And Joab, the general, hears of this and he hears that the king has covered his face and is going around crying from the bottom of his heart, Oh my son, Absalom, Oh Absalom, my son.

And then Joab goes into the house of the king and he addresses the king and says to him, 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 because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you.

[15 : 25] For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you. For today I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased.

Now therefore arise, go out, and speak kindly to your servants. For I swear to 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.

And 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 the people came before the king.

It's a magnificent story, isn't it? And I'm sure that what it reflects for us is that victory which God has won for us in Christ is the ultimate victory.

and our hearts are so perverted that we cannot hear it as good news and think of it so often as being our being robbed of all the ambitions and all the desires that we have for ourselves and fail to see what it is that God has done in Christ by his victory in death on the cross and in the resurrection.

[16 : 59] Do you mean we can't live our own lives our own way? Do you mean there's something more important than the ambitions which I entertain in my own heart?

Do you mean there's something greater than those things which I aspire to? Yes, indeed. Paul picks it up and reflects this same experience when he says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes a profound victory has been won and if you're not able to appropriate the implications of that victory then worse for you.

If you are not able to understand what it is that God has accomplished in Christ, if you're not able to understand why little children are marked on their foreheads with the sign of the cross the death of Christ, then you and I are in trouble because we don't understand the victory that has been won for us in Christ.

And we all go off mourning our own sense of loss instead of celebrating the tremendous victory that belongs to us. it's a very profound story, isn't it?

And I think it searches all our hearts deeply that we may know the awesome reality of the victory that has been won for us that we might count all our petty ambitions as Paul says as dumb compared to the excellency of knowing Christ and sharing in the victory that he has won.

[18 : 58] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.