If only I had died instead of you

2 Samuel 18:1-33

Key Verse 18:33

“The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Good morning! How are you today? Today is already last Sunday of March. We have 9 months to go this year. The title of today’s message is “If only I had died instead of you.” The key verse comes from verse 33. Can we read verse 33 together? (Read key verse). Through the passage we want to turn our eyes upon Jesus. That’s the special shares. Let’s pray. (Prayer)

One mother told me a story one day. Her son made a huge mistake. It was not just a mistake but terrible mistake. So he came to his mother and said, “Mother, I am very sorry. I disappointed you so much.” Since his mistake was so bad he could not believe his mother’s love. So with timid voice he said, “Do you still love me?” When his mother heard her son her heart was broken. She immediately embraced him and told him, “Of course, I do. No matter whatever you do I love because you are my son.” She was very right. She dearly loved him. Regardless of what he has done because he was her own son.

In today’s passage king David loved Absalom because he was his son when Absalom was trying to kill him. The love of king David for Absalom reminds us of God’s love for us as well. So today we would like to know how much king David loves his son and how much God loves us as well. My message has two parts. Part one. “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake” (v.1-18). Part two. “Is the young man Absalom safe?” (v.19-33).

Part I. “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake” (v.1-18)

Look at verses 1 and 2.

1 David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. 2David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab’s brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, “I myself will surely march out with you.”

Let’s read verse 1 together. “David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds.” David and his men stayed in the city name “Mahanaim”. And the time came for the battle. So Absalom’s army was coming and David needed to go out and fight. Finally he had time to organize his troops. So over his men he appointed commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. According to verse 2, David divided his troops in three divisions. One third under the command of Joab, and another third under the command of Joab’s brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and still another under the command of Ittai the Gittite. Ittai the Gittite was a Gentile general. He came to David short time ago. But he was so loyal to David he followed David all the way even though David did not know where he went when he ran away from his son Absalom. So David really trusted him and he gave him the command of one third of his whole troops.

And the key David knew that his soldiers were going out for battle at the risk of their own lives for him and his kingdom. So he told them, “I myself will surely march out with you.” But they said, ““You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won’t care about us. Even if half of us die, they won’t care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city.”

If the king was present among the army Absalom’s army will try to kill him no matter what. So David’s presence will be only a burden instead of encouragement to David’s army. David understood. So he replied, “I will do whatever seems best to you.”

So while his soldiers marched out in unites of hundreds and unites of thousands the king stood beside the gate. Let’s read verse 5 together. Let’s go. “The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.”

The command of the king was rather strange. “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” If king David were an ordinary king, his command would be something like this. “Be strong and courageous. You’ve been through many battles with me. But this battle is the most important. Depending upon the victory or defeat of the battle you and I will die or they will die, and our kingdom will sustain or not. Therefore be strong and courageous. Be a man and fight! Especially take care of the rebellious guy Absalom. Make sure to kill him!”

But he said, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” It is a battle situation. How can you be gentle to your enemy? If you don’t kill your enemy your enemy will kill you. And Absalom was the head of your enemies. “Be gentle”. What does it mean “be gentle”? One of David’s soldiers interpreted ‘be gentle’ as ‘protect’. “Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.” Protect? I am going to out to kill his soldiers. Protect him? What does it mean? Very contradicting command.

And David gave this command not just before three generals but while all his troops hearing. David did so so that they would be no mistake. “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” “Young man Absalom”. Was Absalom teenager? Probably not. Absalom could be forties or even fifties. But David called him “young man – inexperience, prone to make mistakes.” Still he was a young man before David.

“For my sake.” David could not issue the command for their sake. He was asking them for his sake. “For me”. “I am telling you. Please be gentle with the young man Absalom for me. For my sake.” And all the troops heard.

What happened to the actual battle? “6David’s army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim.” (Showing the map on power point). Arrows showing the movement of David. King David went to Jerusalem, moved to Bahurim and crossed the Jordan River and he was in Mahanaim, and his troops came out of the city and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. Verse 7 “There Israel’s troops were routed by David’s men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men.” Twenty thousand young and innocent soldiers died that day. “8The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.” What does it mean “the forest swallowed up more men.” Probably because there was a lot of dangers in the forest, hidden pits and swamps, very sharp stumps. So many soldiers could die because of this forest. This shows that the Lord was using the forest of Ephraim against the soldiers of Absalom.

What happened to Absalom by the way? Let’s read verse 9. “Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.” I don’t know why he was riding a mule. If he was riding a horse I understand. It was a battle field. But he was riding a mule. For what? Anyhow he was riding a mule. And the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, and Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. And he was left hanging in midair. In the past, Absalom’s hair was the symbol of his handsome appearance. His hair was so beautiful, beautiful than most of women’s hair. Now his hair got caught and his hair, the symbol of his physical beauty, became the source of his direct death. He was left hanging in midair. If someone sees Absalom from far away, he was like a man hanging himself, committing suicide. So people saw him. One of the soldiers saw him.

So when one of the soldiers saw what had happened he told Joab, ““I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree.” Joab could not believe what he heard. So he asked the man who had told him this, “What? You saw him? Why didn’t you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior’s belt.” You just missed the chance to be promoted and get a handsome reward. You are foolish man!

What did he say? “Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king’s son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.’ 13And if I had put my life in jeopardy (meaning if I kill Absalom) —and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me (meaning you will say to the king, “This guy killed Absalom, not me.) But Joab replied, ““I’m not going to wait like this for you.” So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree.” (v.14) Absalom was completely powerless. Absalom was not able to draw his sword and cut his hair or cut the branches of the oak tree. He was not able to harm anyone. But why did Joab take three javelins and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while he was still alive? That was not it. Ten of Joab’s armor-bearers, according to the spirit of their commander-in-chief, surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

Was Joab gentle with the young man Absalom? No! He was brutal and violent. Joab might have thought it was the best interest for David and his kingdom for Absalom to die. But he didn’t need to kill him in such a violent and merciless way. How much pain would Absalom have felt when three javelins penetrated his own heart? Then ten of Joab’s armor bearers basically butchered him and mutilated his body when he was already dead.

Finally it was the time for him to be judge for his rebellion. Then of course the war was finished. So Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. (v.16) Then They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites (soldiers of Absalom) fled to their homes. (v.17) So this is the end of Absalom’s life. His tomb was in the forest, with a large heap of rocks over him.

Let’s read verse 18 together. “18During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, “I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.” He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.”

When we look at this verse, Absalom is like you and me. Absalom wanted his honorable name. Absalom wanted people after him to remember his name as honorable name. “Absalom, what a noble man he was!” But his monument did not become the monument of honor but the monument of misery. No one wants to name his children ‘Absalom’. Have you seen the name “Absalom”? No. His name is not honorable name; the name of rebellion, name of shame and misery. Why did he become like this? Why did he who once had a noble desire to have his honorable name down through the generations had to die in such a misery, shame and pain? Why did he become like this?

He ended his life in misery because he did not believe the love of his father. When he killed Amnon he rant to grandfather’s and mother’s place, Geshur, the kingdom of Geshur. When he returned to Jerusalem his father did not see him for two years, giving him a chance to repent. But he did not believe his father’s love. He doubted his father’s love. He became bitter. He thought his father mistreated him. So when he was able to see his father’s face two years later, he began to steal the hearts of Israel people. Four years later he rebelled against his father and he was trying to kill his own father. He did not believe the love of his father. His father must have known when Absalom tried to steal the hearts of people. But his father trusted him. His father loved him and believed him. But he betrayed his father’s love and trust. And he ended his live in misery and shame. Who cares about Absalom anymore?

Part II. “Is the young man safe?” (v.19-33)

“Is the young man Absalom safe?” “Absalom” was missed out. At that time there is no emails or military communication tools. So the news of victory or defeat was delivered by messengers. Men who can run very fast. Two messengers here, Cushite, an Ethiopian man, a professional messenger, and Ahimaaz son of Zadok. Zadok was a priest, and Ahimaaz already delivered a very important message to king David according to the advice of Hushai. The king David and his men should cross the Jordan at that very night. So obviously Ahimaaz son of Zadok has a very close relationship with the commander-in-chief Joab. So Ahimaaz said to Joab, ““Let me run and take the news to the king that the Lord has vindicated him by delivering him from the hand of his enemies.” (v.19) And Joab tried not to send him out. Joab said, ““You are not the one to take the news today, You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king’s son is dead.” He knew the king’s son is dead. He killed him. He knew how much king David would be sorrowful. So he tried to not send Ahimaaz. Then he sent Cushite. ““Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.” (v.21)

But Ahimaaz was persistent. “Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite.” Joab replied one more time, ““My son, why do you want to go? You don’t have any news that will bring you a reward.” (v.22) You will only make the king very sorrowful. But he still said, “Come what may, I want to run.” So Joab said, “Go”. Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.

Why does Ahimaaz want to run so much? Why did Ahimaaz want to run even before Cushite? I think Ahimaaz loved David. He wanted to deliver the good news as soon as possible. He thought that was what David was waiting for. What was David waiting for? Let’s read verses 24-27 responsively. I will go first. “24While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. 25The watchman called out to the king and reported it. The king said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.” And the runner came closer and closer. 26Then the watchman saw another runner, and he called down to the gatekeeper, “Look, another man running alone!” The king said, “He must be bringing good news, too.” 27The watchman said, “It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok.” “He’s a good man,” the king said. “He comes with good news.”

The king David was waiting between inner and outer gates, so anxiously to hear the good news. He was like a father of the prodigal son described in Luke’s gospel. And the king wanted to hear the good news so much that he was trying to convince himself ‘good news is coming to him.’ When he was told one man is coming, he said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.” When he heard another man is coming, he said, “He must be bringing good news, too.” When he heard that it looks like Ahimaaz, he said, “He comes with a good news.” Fact, he comes with good news. That’s it. What kind of good news did David long to hear that he tried to convince himself so much?

Let’s read verses 28-33 responsively. I will go first. “28Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, “All is well!” He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, “Praise be to the Lord your God! He has delivered up those who lifted their hands against my lord the king.” 29The king asked, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” Ahimaaz answered, “I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king’s servant and me, your servant, but I don’t know what it was.” 30The king said, “Stand aside and wait here.” So he stepped aside and stood there. 31Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The Lord has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.” 32The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.” 33The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Here king David completely failed to function as the king, chief justice of the land. When he heard the news, “All is well. The Lord gave him the victory” he could have said, “Praise God who gave us the victory! And I am very thankful that all my soldiers are safe.” Then he could have added, “By the way, is the young man Absalom safe?” But he didn’t do so. The only sentence that came out of his mouth was “Is the young man Absalom safe?” It looks like he was only caring about the safety of his son Absalom, just one person. It looks like he didn’t care for the safety of all his soldiers.

When he heard that his son was dead, he could not control his sorrow. So he cried out, ““O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!” He was like so selfish man! He only cared about Absalom. Why did the king David love Absalom so much? Why? Why did king David love Absalom so much?” Answer? Because he is his son. How many times did he say, “my son”? “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!” Five times. Who doesn’t like one’s own sons and daughters? Who doesn’t like them?

But the love of the king David’s for Absalom was the shadow of God’s great love for us. David’s cry, ‘If only I had died instead of you”, was finally fulfilled 1,000 years later by his own descendant, King, Jesus. His own descendant, Jesus Christ, the King, died instead of all of us.

Let’s read Romans 5:8. Let’s go. “But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us.” While Absalom was still a sinner, while Absalom was trying to kill his own father, David was willing to die. What David could not do, David’s descendant, the King, Jesus, did 1,000 years later. David’s cry ‘If only I had died instead of you” was finally fulfilled through his descendant.

David’s love for his son Absalom is the shadow of God’s great love for us. Parental love is the shadow of God’s great love for us. We all have parents. We all have fathers and mothers. Raise a hand if you do not have fathers and mothers. Anyone? We all have fathers and mothers. And God poured out his great love for us through our fathers and mothers, and spiritual fathers and mothers.

I have 85 aged mother. And I feel like she will go to heaven within a year because she kept repeating visiting hospital and her place, nursing home. My father passed away 10 years ago. When my father was young he had a lot extramarital affairs with women. So m mother suffered a lot. So my father’s own parents, my grandfather and grand mother advised my mother, their daughter-in-law, “Go and find a new life. My son does not deserve to have you as his wife.” But this is what my mother told me many times.   
”But when I look at your eyes, the eyes of my children, who do not know anything, I could not leave.” “You guys were so innocent when I look at your eyes. I couldn’t leave.” So my mother stayed and at the sacrifice of her happiness. Because of her love our family was maintained and my father died away with his wife at his side. And all of us, four, 2 sons and 2 daughters, all graduated college and I became a man who can trust others because of their great love for me. Even my father who had so much affairs with women loved me so much. Their trust and love for me was the shadow of God’s love for me. And I know because of the love and trust for me I am able to trust others.

When I studied the bible first I did not know why my bible teacher loved me so much. I was born again after 7 or 8 years later of my first bible study. So if your bible students are not born again within 7 or 8 years, have hope in them. Who knows they may be like me? Give them time at least 7 or 8 years! Remember! Remember my case! 7 or 8 years later I was born again. Then I realized where did this love come from. The love my bible teacher poured down upon my life was the very love of God. God poured out his love upon my life through my bible teacher! God poured out his own love for me upon my life through my parents and my bible teachers, my spiritual parents. Do you have your parents? Do you have your fathers and mothers? Do you have your own bible teachers? Do you have spiritual seniors? Be thankful. You are very lucky men. You should be very thankful for them. You should never doubt their love because their love is not human love. Their love is God’s love poured upon your life through them. God is just using them as his tools and instrument. Don’t doubt their love. Of course they are not perfect. But don’t doubt their love. Listen to them and obey them and trust them. Do not complain.

David’s cry, “If only I had dies instead of you” was fulfilled 1,000 years later through his own descendant Jesus. Apostle Paul was moved by the love of God in Jesus Christ. So he said in Romans 8:31-39. Let’s read responsively. I will go first.

“31What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Let’s read verse 32 once more together. “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” He gives us all things. We don’t have any reason to doubt his love. Let’s read verse 37 one more time. “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” There are more difficulties and trials. But we can be more than conquerors through the love of God demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

Today we see how much king David loved his son Absalom. We see how much God loves us as well. God poured out his own love for us through our parents, through our spiritual parents, bible teachers, counselors, guiders, and mentors. So let us never doubt the love of God which means to obey him and not to sin. David’s cry, “If only I had died instead of you” was carried out and fulfilled by his own descendant, King Jesus, 1000 years later.

One word: If only I had died instead of you.