



**HAMILTON 2009**  
**Pastor Lance Steicke**

**“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, if only I had died instead of you - O Absalom, my son, my son.” 2 Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33**

These have got to be the saddest, most heart-rending words ever. spoken – words wrenched out of David’s gut when he heard the report of Absalom’s death.

The Bible doesn’t play down the deep reality of human emotions. It doesn’t play down the reality of suffering and grief and death. David suffered. David grieved. David faced death.

Emotions vary from person to person, occasion to occasion.

There’s no prescription from God on how to express emotion, on how to endure suffering, how to bear grief, or how to face death, whether one’s own or that of a loved one.

God has created u with emotions. He’s created us as emotional beings. Feelings play an important part in our lives.

Now feelings may play an important part in our lives, but they do not play a part in our salvation. Let me stress that.

We’re not saved by our feelings

We’re not saved by our sentiments

We’re not saved by how we feel in relationship to God and to the Lord Jesus

We are saved alone by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and his atoning punishment and payment for our sins.

But the fact that feelings don’t play a part in our salvation is not to be interpreted to mean that we are not emotional beings and are not to have feelings.

What kind of feelings we have and how intense they are is not the significant thing. On the day of the funeral of your loved one you may have been choked full of emotion or you may have had no emotion at all.

Suffering is a legitimate experience. Grief is a legitimate experience. And David experienced both to the full.

David was not exempt from suffering. Christians are not exempt from suffering.

- Christians get cancer the same as non-Christians
- Christians are involved in car accidents just as non-Christians are
- Christians die just as non-Christians die
- When you as a Christian hit your thumb with a hammer, it hurts just as much as it hurts the person who rejects Jesus completely. And I guess what you are tempted to do and say is the same temptation as the non-Christian. What you do with that temptation may differ.

So Christians are not exempt or immune from suffering.

Sometimes we suffer, not because of our sin or the sin of others, but simply because that's the kind of world in which we live. We live in a sinful, imperfect world, a broken world.

In the case of David, here in our text, there is a clear cause or causes for his suffering. It goes back to the rape of Absalom's beautiful sister, Tamar. She was raped by her half-brother, Amnon, also Absalom's half-brother. We are dealing here with David's children albeit by different wives.

Absalom was enraged by the rape and avenged his sister's honour by killing Amnon.

David in turn had to deal with Absalom. He had to deal with him as his king and as his father. As his king he had to see that justice was done and as his father he had to continue a father-son relationship with him.

David does a pretty poor job of this both as king and as father. As a king there was no justice from David. As a father he hardened his heart against Absalom and refused to see him or to meet with him.

This was now the third monumental sin in David's life.

- He had committed adultery with Bathsheba
- He had murdered Uriah
- And now he shuns and rejects Absalom resulting in Absalom's death.

But hardship brings out the best in David's suffering. Suffering can, of course, if we let it, make us worse. But God wants it to make us better.

- In suffering David recovers and receives the forgiveness of sins upon his repentance
- In suffering David recovers humility
- In suffering David recovers prayer
- In suffering David recovers compassion.

Compassion!

### **BE GENTLE WITH THE YOUNG MAN ABSALOM FOR MY SAKE.**

That's the command David gives to his leaders.

But they don't heed it.

Absalom, with his hair caught in the branches of the oak tree, dangling there unable to get down and escape, could have been spared by Joab's men. Instead he is killed.

And so David laments when the news of Absalom's death is brought to him.

## **O MY SON ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON ABSALOM, IF ONLY I HAD DIED INSTEAD OF YOU – O ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON.**

David suffers and David grieves.

Grief, of course, is not just over the loss of a loved one. It can be over any loss.

The loss of a job

The loss of a home

The loss of health

The loss of the environment in which we live

The loss of a neighbour or friend who moves away

The loss of an important possession or heirloom

The loss of a pastor who moves away from a parish or resigns, as in your case.

Grief is an important emotion or process, a gift of God to help us cope with loss. We should therefore not try to avoid grieving. To bottle up grief is to bring harm to oneself, emotionally and physically.

Christians grieve, **BUT WE DO NOT GRIEVE AS OTHERS WHO HAVE NO HOPE.**

There is nothing wrong with grieving, nothing wrong with tears and weeping. **JESUS WEPT.**

The Bible tells us we are to **WEEP WITH THOSE WHO WEEP AND REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE.**

I've seen all sorts of responses to grief at the time of funerals and after.

- I've seen smiles and great rejoicing over the resurrection victory
- I've seen devastation, no smiles, nothing but a shattered look
- I've seen a combination of smiles and tears. I recall the latter very well at one funeral in New Zealand. A wonderful Christian woman had died after struggling with cancer for many years. There was her husband at the funeral greeting people as they arrived, a beautiful broad smile on his face but with tears streaming down both cheeks.

I don't cite that incident to say that's how it should be for every Christian at every funeral. In fact, I'm not suggesting any one of the expressions of grief just cited is the right or wrong way to grieve. I'm simply reporting some of the differences there are. Nor am I suggesting the smiles come from Christians and the devastating tears come from non-Christians. Devastating tears can come from the strongest of Christians.

The nature of grief is that it is personal and it will vary from person to person and occasion to occasion.

There are many stages to grief.

- **Shock and denial** –'I don't believe it.' 'No, it can't be true'
- **Emotional release**
- **Depression.** Some people's depression comes immediately, some lasts a long time, some only in short bursts, some not at all

- **Panic** –with difficulty coping
- **Guilt** –‘Why didn’t I do this?, Why didn’t I do that? Why wasn’t I there with him/her?’
- **Anger**, including anger against God and the departed
- **Immobility** – just not being able to make decisions, not being able to do things.
- **Re-emergence of hope and reality** and the establishment of normal life. I would like to think you as a congregation are getting close to that now.

All of these stages and emotions may occur from time to time, either one at a time or even all together. There is no set pattern to grief.

Connected to the public aspect of grief is the importance of ritual – the funeral, devotions and devotional life, simply going through the ritual of previous occasions done in the presence of the loved one.

David’s grief was both public and private. He was king. Every one saw him and his reaction and how he felt and what he did.

**THE KING WAS SHAKEN. HE WENT UP TO HIS ROOM OVER THE GREAT 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.**

We can’t think of David without thinking of Jesus. Both were involved in suffering.

- David suffered because of sin, the sin of others and his own sin.
- Jesus suffered, not because of his own sin, but because of the sin of the world, bearing the burden of that sin in his own body on the cross.

When David said to the leaders, **BE GENTLE WITH THE YOUNG MAN ABSALOM FOR MY SAKE**, he was descending from the heights of Jerusalem down the ‘Jericho Road’ into the wilderness of the Jordan. He was descending the same road that a thousand years later Jesus ascended when he went up to Jerusalem to suffer & die.

Prior to that entry into Jerusalem, **JESUS WEPT**. He wept at the death of his friend Lazarus. He grieved.

That incident, recorded in the well-known Chapter, John 11, contains a classic illustration of the processes of grief mentioned a while ago.

Mary and Martha are grieving over the death of their brother Lazarus.

- There was crying
- There was uncertainty, anxiety, mixed-up emotions
- There was anger and blame – ‘Why didn’t you come earlier, Jesus?’ **IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE, MY BROTHER WOULD NOT HAVE DIED.** ‘It’s your fault, Jesus.’

But through all this there is

1. Trust – trust in Jesus
2. Resurrection – **I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE**
3. The glory of God – **THIS SICKNESS WILL NOT END IN DEATH. NO, IT IS FOR GOD’S GLORY SO THAT GOD’S SON MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH IT.**

Right throughout John's Gospel, Jesus tells us where to look in the midst of suffering, grief and death. And that, of course, is to look to Jesus himself. The writer to the Hebrews says, **LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH.**

We need to seek occasions to work through our grief with our focus always on Jesus.

- There's the danger that we bypass the working through of grief.
- Or there's the danger that we work through grief but bypass Jesus in doing so.

The message of every Christian funeral is **THEY THAT SOW IN TEARS SHALL REAP IN JOY BRINGING THEIR SHEAVES WITH THEM.**

The great reversal of Easter Sunday, **HE IS NOT HERE. HE IS RISEN**, speaks to us loudly and clearly throughout life and in our grief. Lazarus is raised from the dead. Jesus is raised from the dead. **I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY**, we confess in our Creeds.

David laments, **O MY SON ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON ABSALOM, IF ONLY I HAD DIED INSTEAD OF YOU – O ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON.**

In the Gospels we are told, **AT THREE O'CLOCK, JESUS GROANED OUT OF THE DEPTHS CRYING LOUDLY, ELOI ELOI, LAMA SABACTHANI. MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?**

David felt abandoned and therefore full of grief at the death of his son.

Jesus felt abandoned because his father was forsaking him.

The one was abandoned by his own sin and the sinfulness of others. The other was abandoned, not because of his own sin (he had none) but because of the sin of the world.

We could easily put these words of David in his lament over Absalom into the mouth of Jesus – with a slight difference.

Looking at us, and calling us his sons, his daughters, his children, we could have Jesus say,

O Lance, O Leah, O Bill, O Jill, O my son, O my daughter,  
**WOULD THAT I HAD DIED INSTEAD OF YOU.**

**WOULD THAT I HAD DIED INSTEAD OF YOU.**

And then, of course, we realize that he did. Jesus did.