

Title: Do the Wicked Prosper?

Scripture: 2 Samuel 14

Series: The Promise of the Messianic Kingdom

1. Introduction:

a. Our passage tells the story of a wayward son who is eventually brought back from exile. Many have called this the Old Testament's version of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. However, viewing our story in this light would be spiritually and theologically incorrect. What we have here is not a prodigal's return but the failure of a king to act justly. Therefore, unlike the prodigal son in the New Testament, Absalom returns home after having committed premeditated murder without ever showing remorse or repentance.

i. At every turn, Absalom demonstrates a hatred for God and his commands, and yet, at the end of this chapter, it seems that he is prospering and that there are no consequences for his evil actions. Absalom is restored to the family and the kingdom, becoming first in line to the throne. It seems that neither David nor God will hold Absalom accountable.

ii. It is enough for the believer to ask, as many have:

1. Why do the wicked prosper?

2. Why is it that they do not reap the evil that they have committed?

3. But be careful with such thoughts. Our passage tells us that the wicked can prosper for a brief time, but the wicked cannot escape the justice of the true king.

- a. **Proverbs 14:11-12** The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish. (12) There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.
- b. We begin with Absalom. In law, Absalom was a Hebrew, circumcised on the eighth day, but in spirit, he had no true love for the God of his father. He was a product of an ungodly marriage between David and the daughter of the King of Geshur. Therefore, he fled to his grandfather's kingdom after killing his brother. Do not be mistaken. The Scriptures present Absalom as an unregenerate hypocrite. His hatred for his father, the evil he will demonstrate in the coming chapters when he tries to depose the man that God called to the kingdom, and the vow which he pretends to have taken when he was away in Syria, that if he were invited back to Jerusalem, he would "**serve the Lord,**" all point to a man infected with the spirit of idolatry. Absalom's god was himself! Idolatry never produces love for God or His people.

2. Verses 1-24: The Merciful and Just God:

- a. Verse one makes one thing clear. David loved Absalom more than he loved Amnon. When time had eased the thoughts of Absalom's great crime, the king "**was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.**"
 - i. There was no great hole left in David's heart, no craving for Amnon, but there was longing in his heart for Absalom - **the king's heart went out to**

Absalom. The Scriptures will make it clear that Absalom was David's favorite son. Therefore, David was in a painful dilemma. He was placed between two opposite impulses, the judicial and the paternal.

1. The judicial calls for the punishment of Absalom, and the paternal craves for his restoration.
- ii. The deep love of David for Absalom caused him to disobey the law of God, to sacrifice the judicial in favor of the paternal.
 1. David, too, was guilty of idolatry. Idolatry is to love anyone or anything more than God.
 - a. David mirrored Eli's idolatry as recorded in **1 Samuel 2:29** Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?'
 - b. So the first part of the chapter records how David, because of his idolatrous love for Absalom, sacrificed the judicial to the paternal, his judgment to his feelings, and the welfare of the kingdom for the gratification of his love. It was evident that Absalom was not a fit man to succeed David on the throne.
 - c. Not only was Absalom not the right kind of man, but, as his actions had shown, he was the very opposite. Because of his sinfulness, he was an outlaw and an

exile, fleeing justice. And in exile, he had never demonstrated any repentance. He had never asked God, the king, or the people for forgiveness.

i. Because of this, no steps should have been taken to bring him back and make him the successor.

1. The only fitting punishment for a deliberate and calculated murder was death.

ii. Yet, despite all this, the king, in his secret heart, desired to get Absalom back.

1. So Joab hires the woman of Tekoah. Her job was to stir David's feelings and not his conscience. This is, of course, walking by sight and not by faith.

d. Joab arranged with her to go to the king with a false story and induce him to bring back Absalom. She summarizes her distress. She is a widow who had two sons; they were fighting out in the field; there was no one to intervene; one struck the other with a fatal blow; and now the rest of the clan was calling for the remaining son to be turned over, according to the command of God, to be executed for taking his brother's life.

i. This would leave her destitute and without an heir for her husband.

e. On hearing the case, the king seems to be swayed. The woman wants David to take an oath about immunity for her son, and David agrees.

f. Here, the woman now asks for permission to speak even more openly. She accuses the king of being hypocritical. The king has decreed that the woman's banished son should be restored, but he has not moved

a finger to restore his banished son. In other words, she tells David that he has not acted according to the mercy of God.

- i. **We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.**

1. This sounds pious and correct until we examine it in light of scripture.

- ii. She knew that any difficulties the king might have in restoring his son would arise from his fears that he would act against God's will. The clever woman fills his eye with considerations only on the mercy and forbearance of God, but deliberately ignores the justice of God.
- iii. She gives David what seems to be a parallel account of her son and David's. Both sons killed a brother. Both sons deserve death, not mercy. Both sons should be forgiven and restored. That is her argument.
- iv. Yet the cases are not parallel at all. The widow's sons get into a fight somewhere off by themselves; one thing leads to another, and the blows of the winner prove fatal to the other. In other words, the brother's slaying in her story was not intentional or with malice aforethought; it was the sad result of mutual hostility.
- v. But Absalom's act against Amnon was utterly different. Absalom's act was a methodically planned, long-calculated act of carefully nursed

hatred. It was premeditated murder. And it cried out for justice, not clemency.

1. **Genesis 9:6** “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

g. This woman’s reasoning was unbiblical. It ignored the facts and misrepresented the character of God.

Brethren, to overemphasize the mercy of God at the expense of the justice of God is sin. This is a sin we see too often today. Many believe that because God is love, he will not punish the sins of men. They believe that God will somehow restore them without the necessary repentance and at the expense of His divine justice.

- i. Unfortunately, David surrendered to this type of thinking. Beloved, David fails to act justly. He initially swept the sins of Amnon under the rug, and now the sins of Absalom. Man is prone to think that sin can be covered up. We tend to believe that because God is such a loving God, he will not be just and hold us accountable for our sins. But God is not like us. He is mercy, but He is Holy as well.

h. We see this truth at the cross of Calvary. At Calvary, this same collision of the paternal and the judicial presented itself to God the Father. The sin of man created the same difficulty in God. The judicial spirit, demanding man’s punishment, collided with the paternal spirit, desiring man’s well-being. How did God solve this problem? Did he, like David, demonstrate mercy by sacrificing his justice? No

beloved. In the Gospel, we received a very different solution.

- i. Our sin demands that satisfaction be made to that law of the Divine Judge. God could not abandon His judgment seat so that He may grant a cheap mercy.
- ii. Cheap grace, in reality, is no solution because it sacrifices the very character of God. The true and only solution, by which holy reverence is shown both to the judicial and the paternal, is found in the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

1. **2 Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
2. **Hebrews 9:28A** so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...
3. **Romans 5:8-10** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (10) For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

- iii. This is the power of the death of Christ for sinners. God's justice is satisfied so he can act according to His mercy. **God does bring his banished ones home**, but he does so only after pouring his wrath for their sin upon the Son. He

both punishes our sins in Christ and brings the repentant to himself.

1. David failed miserably.

a. There was no justice, only cheap grace for the unrepentant. David's failure will prove devastating in the coming chapters.

3. Verses 24, 28-33: Does Evil Prosper:

a. Upon Absalom's return, the king refuses to see his son, and for two years, Absalom lives in his own house without enjoying any of the privileges of royalty. It seems that David was afraid to pardon him completely. His conscience told him it should not be done. Absalom returned to Jerusalem but was still exiled.

b. Absalom was not the type of man to accept this treatment. His proud spirit could not stand to hear of royal business and festivities at which all were present except himself. It could be at this time that Absalom started planning his coup.

c. David and Joab seem to have sensed a danger to the kingdom in Absalom's complete restoration. After two years, the patience of Absalom was exhausted. He sent for Joab to negotiate for a change. But Joab would not see him. A second time, he sent, and a second time, Joab declined. Joab was in great difficulty. He seems to understand that he had made a mistake bringing Absalom to Jerusalem.

d. Absalom came up with a plan for bringing Joab. Their fields were next to each other, and Absalom sent his

servants to set Joab's barley on fire. The unprovoked attack overcame Joab's unwillingness to meet Absalom. In a rage, he went to Absalom. Absalom then demands that Joab go to David and present David with two choices: either pardon or punish. That is, receive me or execute me. But there is no risk at all because Absalom understood the propensity of David to pass over deliberate sin in his children even when those children were unrepentant. A little groveling before the king was all it took, and the man who seemed to have squandered his life was now amazingly restored. The king forgives his unrepentant son with a kiss.

- i. As we said before, it sometimes appears that evil men are blessed with success, approved by heaven, and free from justice.
- ii. Surely, our chapter ends on a sour note.
- iii. How can a man driven by hatred, guilty of murder, who has friends in high places and the gall to force the issue, receive no earthly or divine punishment for the evil that he has done? It appears that both David and God are unfair.
- iv. Remember, however, the story is not all told. The wicked will not get away with their wickedness. There is a divine judge, and although the wicked seem to prosper for a time, they will one day stand before the judgment seat of God.

1. **Psalm 73:3-9** For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (4) For they have no pangs until

death; their bodies are fat and sleek. (5) They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. (6) Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. (7) Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. (8) They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. (9) They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

2. **Psalms 73:16-19** But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, (17) until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. (18) Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. (19) How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!
3. **Hebrews 4:13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
4. **Matthew 25:41** “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

4. Verses 25-27: The Evil Leaders that We Desire:

- a. It is fair to wonder why verses 25-27 interrupt our story. These verses break the flow of the chapter. The

chapter would read more smoothly if we eliminated these verses and read verse 28 right after verse 24. Why do we have a description of Absalom in the middle of the narrative? However, God the Holy Spirit has placed these verses here for our edification and warning.

- b. And what is God's warning? Be careful with leaders who are outwardly what we desire and yet inwardly unrepentant men. We have seen this type of situation before. We have seen men who are impressive outwardly (appealing to the carnal) yet unholy inwardly. These types of men should never lead. We remember King Saul, who was outwardly impressive yet shallow, wicked, and disobedient.
 - i. **1 Samuel 9:2** And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.
 - ii. **1 Samuel 10:23-24** Then they ran and took him from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. (24) And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"
- c. We must remember the words of God when he disqualified Eliab.
 - i. **1 Samuel 16:6-7** When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed

is before him.” (7) But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

- d. Beloved, we need leaders who are inwardly submitted to God. Suppose we pick leaders based on our favorable opinion regarding their looks, politics, aggressive demeanor, willingness to get in the gutter with their opponents, or any other such criteria. In that case, we do what the people of Israel did with Saul and what they were about to do in the case of Absalom. We tend to gravitate toward the Sauls, Eliabs, and Absaloms offered by this world.
- e. Ask yourself, what were Absalom’s positives?
 - i. All that is said about Absalom is,
 - 1. That he was very handsome...
 - 2. That he had a magnificent head of hair...
 - 3. That his family began to be built up, and they too were beautiful...
 - ii. This was enough for the people. May god forgive us. Nothing is said of his wisdom and holiness. As to his character, we have seen a man lacking in speech, actions, and affection. Inwardly, he was an evil schemer, embittered murderer, blasphemous hypocrite, and immoral destroyer. He openly displayed his evil character, yet because he was smooth with his words and handsome, the people would follow him.

- iii. Beloved, we cannot insist on style over substance in the church and our nation.
 - 1. Let us look to Pastors known for their character, godliness, and soundness and not for their charismatic personalities.
 - a. May the church be led by God the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. Let us vote for politicians known for their Christian character, not their personality, results, looks, or cult following.
 - a. Are the people we are voting for filled with godly character? Is the history of their lives indicative of faithfulness to God?
- f. As Christians, we are to look to leaders who demonstrate a sincere and devoted love for God through Jesus Christ. We are to look to leaders who do the right thing at the office and home. Beloved, character matters to God; therefore, it should matter to us!

5. Benediction:

- a. **Psalms 73:28** But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

Public Reading of Scripture
Psalm 73