

**Monday February 22**

**2 Samuel 18:19-19:8a – moving on**

**19** Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, “Let me run and take the news to the king that the LORD has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.”

**20** “You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him. “You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king’s son is dead.”

**21** Then Joab said to a Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.

**22** Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, “Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite.” But Joab replied, “My son, why do you want to go? You don’t have any news that will bring you a reward.”

**23** He said, “Come what may, I want to run.” So Joab said, “Run!” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.

**24** While 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.

**25** The watchman called out to the king and reported it. The king said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.” And the man came closer and closer.

**26** Then the watchman saw another man running, and he called down to the gatekeeper, “Look, another man running alone!” The king said, “He must be bringing good news, too.”

**27** The 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.”

**28** Then 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 the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king.”

**29** The 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.”

**30** The king said, “Stand aside and wait here.” So he stepped aside and stood there.

**31** Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has delivered you today from all who rose up against you.”

**32** The 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.”

**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!”

**1** Joab was told, “The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.”

**2** And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, “The king is grieving for his son.”

**3** The men stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle.

**4** The king covered his face and cried aloud, “O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!”

**5** Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, “Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines.

**6** You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead.

**7** Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the LORD that if you don’t go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come upon you from your youth till now.”

**8** So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway.

In the last week of January, the United Kingdom passed a grim milestone. The news on the Tuesday of that week announced that over 100,000 people had died of Coronavirus since the start of the pandemic. At that stage, the total was rising by over one thousand each day. Thankfully, this number is

now falling. Each time someone reminds us that behind the statistics, each death involves a real person, a grieving family and sorrowing friends, we are remembering something hugely important.

Last Saturday I talked about the death of Abraham's wife Sarah. He wept. He grieved for her. He bought a piece of land in which to bury her body. A few short words, leaving us to imagine his grief. Today, another passage, this time from 2 Samuel chapters 18 and 19, tells of the death of King David's son Absalom. Not a supportive wife this time, but a rebellious son, killed in a battle with David's loyal forces, in an uprising in which he nearly succeeded in deposing his father to make himself King Absalom.

Abraham grieved for Sarah in her death; David must have grieved for Absalom in his life. So, we might excuse him for being glad to see the back of a son who brought him so much misery. But what we see is precisely the opposite – a king inconsolable in his grief. 2 Samuel says this:

"... for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, "The king is grieving for his son.""

One of his commanders, Joab, went to see him. You might think he wanted to sympathise. Not a bit of it. He tore strips off him.

"I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead."

That's no way to talk to someone who has just been bereaved surely? Especially your king! Wasn't he ashamed of himself?

However understandable it might be to be shocked by Joab's attitude, it does point to something that's really important. There are still things to be done; not just the daily task of getting out of bed and fixing some breakfast. It could be that life during this pandemic is summoning us to fresh tasks, new challenges, even for those who have lost loved ones in the past few months.

And what was David's reaction to Joab's dressing down? No, he didn't have him executed for his impertinence. He accepted his commander's rebuke. I'm sure it wasn't easy, but he rose to the challenge. Good for him!