

IS THE YOUNG MAN SAFE?

"And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was." II Samuel 18:29.

Absalom's biography is one of the most exciting dramas in the Word of God, and at the same time one of the saddest tragedies recorded in any literature. Absalom was the third son of David. His mother was Maachah, daughter of Talmai, the king of Geshur, a kingdom which bordered that of David.

Absalom became a very attractive young man. It was said of him: "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: for the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." He was quite conscious of his perfect physique and was proud of his handsomeness.

Absalom, like the rest of us was born with an unseen blemish, namely, a sinful nature. Moreover, he was reared in an unhappy home. The lurking fact of inbred sin was surrounded by the fertile soil of domestic strife. In the home in which he was reared there was jealousy, immorality, hatred, intrigue, and murder.

In that royal house was Absalom's sister, Tamar, whose beauty fascinated their half-brother Amnon to such an extent that he assaulted and dishonored her. For months Absalom harbored the spirit of revenge against Amnon. After waiting to see if David was going to punish Amnon, and discovering that he was not going to do so, Absalom arranged a feast for his brothers, and during that feast Amnon was slain treacherously according to the instructions of the host. Having thus dipped his hand in his brother's blood, Absalom anticipated and feared the wrath of their father, so he fled to his grandfather in Geshur, where he found refuge from the king's anger. There he remained for three years. The spirit of revenge is a terrible thing in any life or in any home. Is there anyone with whom you are determined to get even?

During his absence we are told that "the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom." But he restrained himself, and allowed Absalom to remain in the other nation three years. After three years, through the intercession of Joab, and the woman of Tekoah who prayed by Joab's inspiration, the king gave permission for Absalom to return. He stipulated, however, that he must live in his own house, and that he should not see the king's face. So Absalom returned to Jerusalem, and lived in his own house; and for two years, though in his father's country, never came into his father's presence, nor saw the king's face. At the end of the two years he asked Joab to intercede for him again, to which request Joab at last reluctantly responded. Absalom was then permitted to come into the presence of his father, whereupon a reconciliation was effected, and the king kissed Absalom.

Absalom had little or no thought for anyone except himself. He sought to exalt himself at the expense and by the aid of others. He was not averse to doing wrong, if he could only gain his ends and come out on top. He was prepared to use any means, fair or foul, to gain his desired ends. He thought that he ought to have everything he wanted, and that it was everybody's business to see that he got it.

Conscious of his unusual attractiveness, and ambitious to capitalize on his pleasing and dynamic personality, Absalom spent four years in plotting to seize the throne of his father. He was so ambitious for the immense power which the position of king gave to a man, he was unprincipled enough to do whatever was necessary to get it.

Before organizing an open rebellion against his father, Absalom set himself to the task of popularizing himself. Rising early each morning, he stationed himself at the gate of the

city where he would be accessible to anybody who had a grievance. The people came to him with their tales of woe, after which they expressed their wishes to him. Wanting to instill in the minds of the people a bad opinion of his father's administration and a good opinion of his own fitness to rule, Absalom expressed his deep regret at the negligence of David, told them either bluntly or subtly that they need not expect any justice from the king, and gave a verdict in favor of every person who was out of sorts with the government. Absalom courted popularity by pretending to be a great social reformer and a special friend of the less fortunate people. He commended himself very highly to the people, told each complainer that his cause was right and just, and then concluded his remarks with the suggestive exclamation, "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" As a result of these base tactics, Absalom gained the reputation of being "a man above all others in the kingdom who had the welfare of the people at heart," and thereby he stole the hearts of the gullible people. This campaign went on a long time without David knowing about it.

Absalom also had access to a large sum of money, so he began to drive a magnificent chariot and had fifty men run before him wherever he went. This was quite a contrast to the mode of travel of his father, which was upon a mule. Such magnificence produced the desired effect, captivating the hearts of the people from the beginning. A schemer of this type always strives for self-display. He cultivates all of the arts and wiles of the showman. Behold how he drives up to the city gate!

Absalom sent spies throughout the land spreading rumors about David's crumbling administration, and the need for young and competent leadership over the kingdom. He enlisted two hundred men to go to Hebron, the former capital, where he intended to hoist the flag of rebellion. These men who accompanied the traitor to Hebron were dupes, and knew nothing of his wicked purpose. He even enlisted Ahithophel, the counselor of David, in the diabolical conspiracy.

To show you the depths to which Absalom went to achieve his purpose, I need only to remind you of how he got the permission of his father to go to Hebron under the pretense that he was going there to offer a sacrifice and to fulfill a long-promised vow. When he left he took with him the young men who preferred the attraction and glamor and beauty of Absalom, and they proceeded to organize the rebellion. As soon as the revolt was organized, they began the march toward Jerusalem. Word of what was taking place was soon dispatched to David. Realizing that many of those for whom he had done much and upon whom he had depended had forsaken him and gone over to the camp of the enemy, David took with him a few faithful followers and fled from Jerusalem and went into the mountains.

Absalom made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem and took formal charge of his father's harem and royal palace. While he remained in the harem indulging in sin, David was organizing his army to suppress Absalom when an opportunity afforded itself. When Absalom finally decided to pursue his father, David had already firmly entrenched himself in the hills of Manahaim.

One day David stood in front of the fortress of Manahaim to review his troops as they marched toward the field of battle. There were three divisions of veteran soldiers. As each division came abreast of David, it halted in order that the men might salute the king. Before it passed on David said to the commander, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." Soon the army of three divisions had vanished into the woods of Ephraim. Absalom and his forces pursued them. The day of battle arrived and the armies met in conflict somewhere in the wooded district. The first onslaught of David's men drove Absalom's army into terrible confusion. Panic-stricken they fled into the neighboring woods only to become a more easy prey to their pursuers.

Deserted by his men, wretched Absalom hurried in terror and fright through the forest, as his glorious locks were flowing in the wind. When the mule on which he was riding galloped under an oak tree, his long hair, of which he was so proud, caught in the low branches, and the mule moved from under him and left him suspended in the air. Although David had commanded his forces to suppress the rebellion but to spare Absalom, as soon as Joab learned that Absalom was hanging in a tree he took three darts and thrust them through his heart and slew him, after which ten soldiers mutilated his body.

Meanwhile David sat waiting for the tidings of the conflict. How rapidly his heart beat with emotion! Two great questions were to be decided: the safety of his boy, and the continuance of the throne of Israel. Who now should break the news to David that Absalom was dead, with three darts in his heart, buried in a pit and covered with a heap of stones? A friend of the king, Ahimaaz, who apparently did not know what had happened, asked permission to run with the tidings. He probably knew that a victory had been won, but not that Absalom was slain. Joab refused to let him run, but commissioned Cushie, a professional Ethiopian runner, to tell David what had happened. But Ahimaaz was persistent, and again besought Joab to let him run. Joab reminded him that he did not have anything to tell. But, because of his importunity and urgency, he gave his consent and let him run also. The Ethiopian had taken the way of the hills; but Ahimaaz, more familiar with the country, chose the way of the plains and outran Cushie. David was still sitting in the place by the gate where his men had last seen him as they marched out to battle. From his lofty station on the tower, the watchman saw the two runners as they made their way toward the city. When the watchman ventured the information that Ahimaaz was the first runner, David was glad and said with evident relief: "He is a good man and cometh with good tidings." In a few minutes the panting runner fell at the feet of the king and said, "All is well." He spoke of victory, but David was thinking of something else. He asked, "Is it well with the young man, Absalom?" The only answer he could make was, "I saw a great tumult, but knew not what it was." In another moment the dusty Cushite came running to the gate. He, too, spoke of victory. He exclaimed: "Tidings, my lord, the king, for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all those that rose up against thee." But vengeance on his foes was the last thought in David's mind. What he wanted to know was whether that vengeance, in choosing its victim, had permitted him who was most guilty to survive. He said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Cushie told him the plain truth, even though he knew it would break David's heart. Without a moment's hesitation he said bluntly: "The enemies of my lord, the king, and all those that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." For David those tidings were the farewell to hope. Wrapping his mantle about him, David went up to the chamber over the gate, crying his heart out: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Ambition of the wrong kind had led Absalom along the downward way and brought him to this tragic end. He had desired his father's throne, prestige, popularity, power, renown, and place. Wrong ambition will always lead one to a tragic destination.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" That was the question that a father asked about his son upon whom he lavished his love, even though the boy was wayward. Oh, what anxieties burn in the hearts of true parents! If only their children could realize this, thousands of chapters of ingratitude would never be written. No matter to what heights they rise nor to what depths they fall, children are in the thoughts, interest and love of their parents until they come to the end of their lives.

Even though David knew that his son meant his humiliation, shame, destruction and death, he asked this plaintive question, "Is my boy safe?"

But David asked this question too late. Absalom was not safe. Three darts had already pierced his body and he was dead. His name was to be shrouded with disgrace throughout eternity.

1. Absalom was not safe because of his father.
Perhaps no story in human biography more vividly warns that the sins of the father often come home in the lives of his children. Absalom was not safe because the shadows of his father's sin took root in his own life.
2. Absalom was not safe because of his attitude toward his father.
A disobedient child is not only a grief to his parents, but is himself headed for a fearful disaster. Perhaps there is no better test of a son or daughter than the attitude of such a child toward its parents.

Many of you can remember when the news was flashed across the land of the sudden death of President Harding. Immediately they began searching for Vice-President Coolidge. He was found far out in the country at the home of his father in Vermont. A thrill went through the nation as people were told how President Coolidge with his hand on the old family Bible, and by the light of a kerosene lamp took the oath of office administered by his father, who was a notary. The praying people of America rejoiced when they read that in the first gleam of morning light, and before the secret service men, who were racing at dangerous speed to reach and guard the president, could arrive, Coolidge slipped away to the little cemetery and knelt by his mother's grave and promised God that he would faithfully perform the duties of his high office. There is hope for a land with such a president. And it is significant that no mark of shame ever marred his private life, his family, or his public service.

3. Absalom was not safe because he had bad associates.
One cannot be safe when with the wrong kind of company. To a great extent our companionships make us or mar us in our earthly lives. God's Word says, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." If one chooses evil companions, he will imbibe their spirit. If he goes with the right kind, even so will he be blessed by their spirit.
4. Absalom was not safe because he had the wrong kind of habits.
Although he was handsome, daring and charming, he was weighted down with the wrong kind of habits. Whenever a young man has extravagant habits, he is digging a pit for himself out yonder somewhere into which he will fall. Your life is imperiled if you yield to a wrong habit.
5. Absalom was not safe because he left God out of his life.
Absalom rebelled against his home, country and God. No man apart from God is safe. A young man is not safe unless he is positively and openly God's friend. No man is able in his own strength to withstand the currents that beat against him. No man is able to cope with Satan and his seductive wiles in his own strength. No one who follows in Absalom's footsteps is safe. Such a one will miss his goal both in life and in death.

Is your life safe? It is not safe if you are in wrong relationship to Him Who made you, Who redeemed you, Who preserves you, Who pleads with you to repent of your sin and believe on Him as your Saviour, Lord and Master. In Him is safety, salvation and victory. Accept Him now as we sing our hymn of invitation.