

2 Samuel 18 David's love cannot save his son

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to read 2 Samuel chapter 18 down to chapter 9 verse 8 and Lucia is going to come and read God's word for us Lucia over to you. David mastered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. David sent out his troops a third under the command of Joab a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruriah and a third under Itai the Gittite.

The king told the troops I myself will surely march out with you but the men 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 10,000 of us it will be better now for you to give us support from the city.

The king answered I will do whatever seems best to you so the king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands the king commanded Joab Abishai and Itai 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. David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim.

There Israel troops were routed out by David's men and the casualties that day were great 20,000 men. The battle spread out over the whole countryside and the forest swallowed up more men than that day than the sword.

[1 : 5 0] Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule. As the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair caught caught in the tree.

He was left hanging in mid-air while the mule he was riding kept on going. When one of the men saw what happened, he told Joab, I have seen Absalom hanging in the oak tree.

Joab said to 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 10 shekels of silver and a warrior's belt.

But the man replied, 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 Itai, Protect the young man, Absalom, for my sake.

And if I had put my life in jeopardy and nothing is hidden from the king, You would have kept your distance from me. Joab said, I am not going to wait like this for you.

[3 : 0 5] So he took three javelins in his hands and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. And 10 of Joab's armor bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

Then Joab sounded the trumpet and the troops stopped pursuing Israel for Joab halted them. They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him.

And meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes. During 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.

Now Ahimez, son of Zadok, said, 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.

[4 : 17] 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.

Then Joab said to the Gushite, Go tell the king what you have seen. The Gushite bowed down before Joab and ran off. Ahimez, son of Zadok, again said to Joab, Come what may, please let me run behind the Gushite.

But Joab replied, My son, why do you want to go? You don't have any news that will bring you a reward. He said, come what may, I want to run.

So Joab said, run. Then Ahimez ran by way of the plane and outrun the Gushite. 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. The watchman called out to the king and reported it. The king said, if he's alone, he must have good news.

[5 : 27] And the runner came closer and closer. Then 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.

The watchman said, it seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimez, son of Sadov. He's a good man, the king said.

He comes with good news. Then Ahimez 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. The king asked, is the young man, Absalom, safe?

Ahimez 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.

[6 : 29] The king said, stand aside and wait here. So he stepped aside and stood there. Then the Gushite 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. The king asked the Gushite, is the young man, Absalom, safe?

The Gushite replied, May the enemies of my lord, the king, and all who rise up to harm you, be like that young man. The king was shaken.

He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said, Oh, my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom, if only I had died instead of you.

Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. Joab was told the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.

[7 : 29] 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.

The men stole into the city that day as men steal in, who are ashamed when they flee from battle. The king covered his face and cried aloud, Oh, my son, Absalom.

Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. Then Joab went into the house of 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.

You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and the men mean nothing to you.

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

[8 : 41] This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now. So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway.

When the men were told the king is sitting in the gateway, they all came before him. Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes. May the Lord have blessing to his word.

Thank you so much, Lucia. It's almost as long as the sermon, isn't it? The reading. So thank you. We appreciate you greatly.

Thank you so much. Let me pray and ask for the Lord's help as we look at his word. Father, we do want to just pray again that you might speak to us from your word. We want to thank you for Lucia's reading and we want to pray that we would understand it truly and properly and that you might speak to us, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, I want, if I can, this morning just to draw out for you three themes from that reading that we have had together. Three big ideas which bring us to the point of the story for us this morning.

[9 : 56] If you've not been with us before on a Sunday morning, it would help you to know perhaps that we have been working our way through this book of 2 Samuel. This isn't just a random passage that I have chosen for this morning because I didn't, you know, because I didn't particularly like Lucia and I wanted her to read a long passage.

No, none of that. This is just where we're up to in our series in 2 Samuel. 2 Samuel, if you don't know, is the story of the ancient King David, the King of Israel.

And our conviction as a church is that not only are these stories in the Bible true, we believe that, and actually most people would recognize that. Rather, our conviction is that these stories are how God speaks to us today in this moment as we look at them together and understand what's going on.

We believe that although the Bible is written by numerous different human authors, it is standing behind all of them, God the Holy Spirit, who inspires them to write these stories for us.

And the same Spirit, now he dwells in our hearts as believers and speaks to us from these stories as we understand them. So with that in mind, let me show you these three themes, which I think have massive relevance for us this morning.

[11 : 08] The first theme is this, it's the theme of love, love. One thing you really can't miss in the story, even if you didn't hear all of it, is the theme of David's love for his son Absalom.

Listen to how he speaks about him in verse 33 of chapter 18. Look down at it, if you like. Oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, if only I'd died instead of you.

Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. Or again, in verse 4 of chapter 19, it's the same thing. Oh, my son Absalom, oh, my son, my son. Now, pointing out that a father loves his son might not seem that amazing, but if you have been with us for the last few weeks for the story here, really this is an incredible thing for David to say about his son Absalom.

Absalom, who is David's oldest remaining son, has plotted treason against his father. He has robbed him of his throne in Jerusalem. He's kicked him out of the city.

He has even had sex publicly with David's wives to bring shame on David and to make himself, in the words of the passage, obnoxious to his father.

[12 : 19] That's what he wanted to do. But it seems that despite everything that Absalom has done against his father, still David loves him. He loves him. Now, so much is that the center of the story, that in verse 5 of chapter 18, David tells all his soldiers as they head out to battle with Absalom to say, be gentle with the young man Absalom, chapter 18, verse 5.

Why does he ask them to be gentle with the young man Absalom? Well, he says, for my sake, he says. I love my son Absalom. I know Absalom has turfed me out of Jerusalem.

I know he's taken the throne. I know that we're now going into a civil war against Absalom and all his forces trying to reclaim Jerusalem and reclaim the throne for myself. But please, for my sake, be gentle with Absalom because I love him, my son.

Now, you have to say, don't you, that a love like that is rare. It's undeserved. It's unfaltering. It's almost irrational, isn't it, in its commitment, despite the faults of the other.

Joab thinks it's irrational. Look at what he says in verse 6 of chapter 19. He says to David, you love those who hate you. You're a fool, David. You love those who hate you. And you hate those who love you.

[13 : 35] And Joab means that as an insult. But you can see this morning, can't you, that this kind of love actually is a wonderful thing. It's wonderful to be loved like this. Maybe you've experienced this from a partner or a friend or a parent.

It's a rare and a precious gift to be loved unconditionally, isn't it? Undeserved, unconditional love. It's what sets humanity apart from the rest of creation, doesn't it?

You know, I have a dog. My dog, I like to think, loves me. Why does my dog love me? Because I feed it, right? If you have a cat, I hate to break it to you, but your cat does not care about you at all, right?

Sorry, Nick. You know it's true. It's why you're covered in scratches, right? But a good parent, a good parent will love their child irrespective of what they do unconditionally, even though there's no benefit in it for themselves.

And science can't explain that love to you, but it's here in 2 Samuel 18. Some of us have experienced it and we know it's true. Unconditional love. The second theme is the theme of frustration. Maybe you didn't notice this, but I think what we're meant to notice as we go through the passage is that the main characters in the story are always frustrated in their intentions.

[14 : 54] Let me try and run through them quickly and you can see what I mean. In verse 2 of chapter 18, David wants to go into battle. So he's divided the people up and arranged them under the three commanders, but then in verse 3, his soldiers won't allow him to go into battle, despite the fact that he wants to go into battle with them.

So much so that he ends up telling his men, which is an incredible thing for a king to tell his men. He says, no, I will obey you. You tell me what to do, he says. There's a sense then that even the battle itself gets frustrated.

So this is a war between Absalom and his forces and David and his forces, or not David because he stayed at home, but David's forces. And despite all of that, despite everyone waving swords around, actually it is the woods that kill more people than the sword.

Did you notice that in verse 8? Imagine that. That's some woods, right? This is not Hampstead Heath. This is not Paddington Wreck. This is like woods, woods, yeah? Serious forest where you can get lost and you can get disorientated and you can lose your life.

In the weirdness of 2 Samuel 18, it is the woods that's the greatest warrior. Absalom is the next to be frustrated in verse 9 as we find that his escape is frustrated by his beautiful long hair getting caught in a tree.

[16 : 14] It's almost in comedy fashion that he's left dangling in this tree as his mule walks under this low-hanging branch. His hair, which I can only imagine, gets caught in a tree and he's left dangling there, helpless and hopeless and frustrated.

We'll return to that in a moment. Next, it's Joab's turn to be frustrated because his soldier won't kill Absalom. Listen, this is what we're here for, right? This is a battle. This is a war, he says.

But he doesn't want to risk disobedience to the king's command and he's suspicious that Joab would be nowhere to be seen if he got in trouble with David. So Joab, the commander, dismisses him and says, I'm not going to wait like this for you.

I'm going to go and kill him myself. So Joab is frustrated. Next, you've got Ahimaz, the messenger appointed by David. So in a world without mobile phones or radio communication, the only way to send a message is to send someone to run with it, a runner.

But the runner was told not to run. He was told he wasn't allowed to go. It's a message that David won't want to hear this. You don't want to go with this. So he sends a Cushite in his place.

[17 : 20] And then the Cushite himself gets frustrated. Why? Well, because Ahimaz outruns him, only to be told by David to step aside because he won't answer his direct question about Absalom. It might be that the inexplicable, unconditional love that we started with is not something that we experience very much.

But I want to hazard a guess that you and I know about this kind of frustration. Yeah. We live, don't we, in a frustrating world. We live in a world where things go wrong all the time.

You live in a world, don't you, where you go to work and despite all your best efforts, you get nothing done, right? You go to school and your water bottle leaks in your bag and ruins your homework.

You live in houses where, at times, or flats where the ceiling falls in because the person upstairs has left the bathtubs running. You know, we try and catch a bus and the bus is late and then you get caught in the temporary traffic lights on Carlton Vale for two whole days before it moves again.

You know, we live in a world where you go out of the house with the new broly that you've brought and it breaks as soon as you put it up, where the bread that you bought from the shop goes mouldy and out of date even before it's supposed to.

[18 : 34] You know, whatever it is, we live in a world that frustrates us all the time. And whatever our intention, nothing ever quite works as we hope it works. But in our passage this morning, all those little frustrations, they're not fighting the woods, they're not being able to run, all of those frustrations are meant to point to one central frustration in the story, which is the frustration of David's love.

So David's love, for all its compassion, for all its unconditional beauty, still David's love cannot save his son Absalom. It's a love that cannot save. And Absalom dies in the end despite David's best intentions.

Don't miss this. Absalom, we know, is under the judgment of God. We've been told that in chapter 17. Absalom has pushed his father out of Jerusalem, taking him off the throne, and he is under the judgment of God for rebelling against God's chosen king.

And David's love cannot stop the judgment of God. So the mule that leaves him dangling, we're not to understand that just as a bit of misfortune or a bit of comedy detail.

This isn't like fail army or you've been framed or whatever it is. No, Absalom is hanging from a tree because he is under the judgment of God. If you know your Bibles, you might know that hanging on a tree is a metaphor in the Bible for being under the judgment of God.

[19 : 54] He is the condemned man of Deuteronomy 21. A hanged man is cursed by God, says Deuteronomy 21.

Even the pile of stones that gets loaded onto him is a pointer back to Achan who stole the devoted treasure of Jericho in Joshua 7 and died under God's judgment. And then there's a monument, isn't there, in verse 18, which Absalom had built presumably to honor his successes, but actually becomes an honor to his failure.

You can imagine, can't you, a young Israelite boy walking past that great statue and saying, who built this, man? Who built this? Oh, that was Absalom. He was king for a bit, but he died under God's judgment.

He got his hair caught in a tree. He dangled, he got speared. And then he was piled under this great pile of stones. He was judged by God's son. Which brings us to the final theme this morning of this, which is substitution.

Substitution. This is more subtle, but I think is really, really important. If you have happened to zone out, zone back in just for this. Notice where the two main characters of the story are, right?

[21 : 03] We've got Absalom hanging by his hair in a tree, the cursed man, a sitting duck for Joab and his spears. And where is David at the same time? Take a look at chapter 18, verse 24.

Look down at your Bibles. Chapter 18, verse 24. While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall.

Here's David. He is sitting at the gate of the city. It's the same again in verse 33 of chapter 18. What does it say? The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept.

Now that might not seem super significant to you, but there are two things to notice about this. One is that in ancient times, the gateway of the city was the place of judgment. It's where the court of the city sat.

It's where you went for justice and for judgment. So David, if you like, is in the place of justice and judgment, while Absalom, his son, is hanging condemned in a tree.

[22 : 07] So David is in the court and Absalom is under justice. But historians and archaeologists will also tell you that David is in a room that is literally hanging between the gateposts of the city.

And in a way, the writer is just trying to paint a picture to show you exactly what's going on here so that you can see it, that Absalom is dangling in the tree under the curse of God's judgment, while David is hanging in the court, the place of judgment and justice, as if to spell out what's happening.

And what's happening? Verse 33, the king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. And as he went, he said, oh, my son, Absalom, my son, my son, if only I was in your place, if only I had died instead of you, if only I could be in the place of judgment and you could be in the place of justice.

Do you see this? David wishes while suspended in midair in the court of justice that he was dangling in the tree, but he wasn't, he couldn't. Because for all of his love, even the undeserved great love, still Absalom is under the curse of God.

And despite David's passion, he still can't stand in for him. Now, I want to suggest to you this morning that that is the great problem in our universe.

[23 : 28] This trouble that gets pictured here in David above the city and Absalom hanging in the tree is a picture of the problem that we all face this morning.

Whoever you are, wherever you're from, however many times you've been to church, this is our problem, isn't it? That for all of our experiences of great love and kindness, despite all the little frustrations of day-to-day life, still the big issue for you and for me is that we stand under the judgment of God and we cannot shake it.

I mean, perhaps that sounds a little harsh. I mean, it's easy, isn't it, to understand why Absalom would be under the curse of God. I mean, he'd stolen a city, he'd stolen wives, he had threatened to kill his own father.

He's a brute, isn't he? But if you think about it, the truth is that you and I do to God exactly what Absalom has done to David. We've seen this time and again in the last few weeks, haven't we?

Absalom treacherously boots his father David out of his kingdom. Now he effectively says, shove off David, I'm gonna be in charge, no to your rule, yes to me.

[24 : 39] He rips the kingdom away from him and takes over the city and the palace. And the Bible will tell you that you and I have done exactly the same. We say, shove off God, I'm in charge of my life.

No to your rule. I'm in charge. Oh yeah, I know. Thank you for that life that you've given me, Lord. I will now live it for myself. Thank you very much. It's for me.

I'll pretend to be interested in you at times. I might even at times call myself a Christian when people ask me. But really God, what you need to know about me is this is my life and I'm living it my way for my own glory and for my own sake.

I will decide what I do. I will decide what is right and wrong. This is my life, not yours. Shove off God. I'm in charge. No to your rule.

And in effect, we are spiritual Absaloms, full of sinful treason. And what you're meant to see in this story is that Absalom is getting exactly what he deserves, right?

[25 : 41] There is a fitting nature to what happens to Absalom. If you've not been here for the story before, you'll have missed the fun of 2 Samuel 18 when it was read for us by Lucia.

The fun of 2 Samuel 18 is that Joab was super proud of his hair, right? He loved his hair. He used to... Sorry, I mean Absalom. Absalom loved his hair.

He absolutely adored his hair. He used to grow it for a whole year and then cut it in a big ceremony that everybody thought was fantastic. What a great guy. And here, his great pride in his hair has been undone as he dangles by his hair in a tree.

What was his pride has now become his downfall. His vanity has undone him. Let me tell you that the Bible is very much the same about hell and judgment that we deserve.

You are meant to read this story and say, Absalom, this is right. You're getting what you deserve. And as we read the Bible, we read and we understand, don't we, that the judgment of hell against our wickedness and our sin is not injustice, but it is justice.

[26 : 53] It is fitting. You know, we say to God, shove off God. I'm in charge. No to your rule. This is my life. I'm going to live it my way for me. And God says, there you go.

Have exactly what you want. Have your own desires. And what do we get? What comes from God handing us over to that desire? What happens when we're in charge of our own lives?

Well, we're like toddlers driving sports cars, aren't we? We are out of our depth and we make a terrible mess. And the hell of this life, the chaotic relationships, the violence, the substance dependence, the dishonesty, the anger, the perpetual anxiety that we all live with, that is just a pale shadow of a judgment to come when God removes his blessing eternally and eternal life.

And eternal life is lived without him. The only source of grace and mercy and kindness and love. You imagine the sort of damage that we can do in 70 years.

Imagine what that's like if it's 10,000 years, 100,000 years, a million years. And here's the point of the passage. In this moment, as we face the judgment of God hanging in that tree, David's love for Absalom, as great as it was, is not enough.

[28 : 14] And so for us, standing before the judgment of God, it does not matter. It does not matter who loves you. It doesn't matter whether you're single. It doesn't matter whether you're married.

It doesn't matter whether you have a loving group of friends or you spent many years in loneliness. It doesn't matter whether your life seems successful or whether it seems a failure. Because even David's inexplicable love, the greatest thing that we know of in this world, even that cannot save Absalom from the justice that he deserves.

And nothing else can save you either. Right? Absalom needs something better. In chapter 18 and 19, Absalom is left needing something better than David's love.

And of course, in the story of the Bible, that's exactly what we find, isn't it? Jesus is the great successor to King David. It's amazing.

When you think that the Bible is written over such a long period of time by so many different people, that what you've got here is a brilliant picture of King Jesus who is still to come. Because King Jesus comes with this kind of love, doesn't he?

[29 : 21] An undeserved love, an unconditional love for his people, for his children. And he too hangs in the place of judgment on the edge of a city.

Not in a room above a gate, but on a cross. Hanging not by his hair, but by nails in his hands. Driven by love, an inexplicable, undeserved love for you and me. And here's the contrast.

Jesus in his love does not say with David, if only I had died instead of you. He says, I give my life as a ransom for you. I am dying instead of you.

I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus, God the son in human flesh, suffering the justice of his own judgment at our sin.

Calling out from the cross, isn't he? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? In a way which is almost impossible for us to fathom that the eternal son in human flesh is bearing the silence of his father from heaven as he is handed over to the judgment that you and I deserve.

[30 : 29] This shove off God, no to your rule, I'm in charge. God hands us over to it and says, that's what you want. That's what you'll get. No, that's what my son gets. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It's worth just chewing on this some more, isn't it? Think about it. Why is it that Jesus can do what David cannot do in 2 Samuel 18 and 19?

What is it about Jesus that means he is able to do what David cannot do? Why can Jesus die for sin and David not? Now, let me tell you, there are loads of right answers to that question, okay?

Let me give you some of them. David, for a start, is full of his own sin. Of course he can't die for Absalom's sin. Why can't he die for Absalom's sin? Well, because David is a murderer and an adulterer as well.

He's as wicked a sinner as Absalom. He can't die for Absalom. He can't die in his place. He has his own wrongs and his own judgment to face. If David dies for Absalom, it makes no scrap of a difference because David, like the rest of us, deserves to die.

[31 : 30] We've seen it time and again. But Jesus is the sinless saviour. Jesus can die for your sin because he has no sin of his own to die for. He is the perfect Lamb of God, the sacrifice without blemish.

Now, that is true. That is gloriously true. And that's why Jesus can die for your sin. But that's not the focus of the passage, I don't think. Let me tell you another reason why Jesus can do what David can't. David is clearly too weak, isn't he, to die for Absalom's sin.

The story of David in 2 Samuel 18, like I've shown you over and over again, is his frustration. Let me go to battle, says David. No, no, you stay at home. Be kind to Absalom.

Oh, they've killed him. David is completely out of control in 2 Samuel 18 and 19. But when you read the gospel accounts, King Jesus, the great fulfillment of David, is in control at every single point.

David is weak. Jesus is strong. David is in charge of nothing and is perpetually frustrated. Jesus is in charge of all things and never frustrated. Jesus is in command all the way through.

[32 : 37] He never turns over his will to people like David does in verse 4. Now, that's definitely right. Jesus can pay for your sin in a way that David could never because Jesus is stronger than David, right?

He is God the Son in human flesh. He's not just a man. He's the God man. He has a power that David will never have. That is absolutely true, right? It's not the point of the passage, I don't think.

Let me tell you, here I think, this is why Jesus can die for your sin in the point of 2 Samuel 18 and 19. Jesus can die for your sin. He can die for my sin. He can rescue spiritual Absalms like us because he loves us even more than David loved Absalom.

That's the point, I think. You see, over and over again, David calls out his love, doesn't he, for his rebellious son Absalom. Oh Absalom, oh Absalom, my son, my son, deal gently with Absalom for my sake.

Yet at the end of the day, no matter the strength of that feeling or even the closeness of their relationship, still David's love is frustrated and insufficient and Jesus' love is never frustrated and never insufficient.

[33 : 49] Let me tell you two ways that Jesus' love is greater. It is greater both in its intensity but also in its power. Think about it with me. The love that Jesus has for his people, like David's love for Absalom, is completely undeserved.

But David's love for Absalom is undeserved, but Jesus' love for us is even more undeserved, right? What do I mean? Well, Jesus' love is not just the love of a father for a rebellious son, it's the love of a perfect triune God, father, son and spirit for a wicked humanity that have lived without thought or reference to him.

This is not just a breach between people spanned by love, this is a breach between heaven and earth, between eternity and time itself, between creator and creature, between perfection itself and wickedness.

Think about it like this. Imagine some stepping stones across a stream in a park. You all know what those are like, don't you? Stepping stones across the stream. There's a sense in which you might want to say that the stepping stones across the stream are marvellous.

They're wonderful. What a great way of getting across that little stream. Without getting my feet wet, I can go on the stepping stones. What great and marvellous stepping stones they are. But then think about the Golden Gate Bridge spanning the San Francisco Bay.

[35 : 14] It's a mile long. It carries six lanes of traffic. It is marvellous in a way that those stepping stones can never match the marvel of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Why not? Well, because the span that they cross is much bigger, right? The gulf it crosses is much bigger. So with God's love.

God's love is more marvellous than David's, like the stepping stones to the Golden Gate Bridge. Because David's love spans the treachery of a rebellious son to his father.

God's love in Christ for us spans the rebellion of wicked humanity against the eternal creator God. He is the one who made us, to whom our lives belong. The one who is perfect in holiness and righteousness.

And still he loves you and me. Creatures who are frail, creatures of dust. Who live but for a short time and live in rebellion and wickedness.

[36 : 15] But also the love of the Lord Jesus rests on a stronger bond than David and Absalom. David was only Absalom's father. Absalom was his oldest remaining son, his heir, his flesh and blood.

David had known Absalom since he took his first breath. But the Bible tells you that God's love for us in Christ is a reflection of a stronger bond than that.

Ephesians 1 tells you that God loved his people before the foundation of the world. That God in Christ set his love on his people not before they took their first breath but before they'd ever been conceived.

That in eternity past, as God transcends over time and history, he sees the accomplishment of his plan to save, saying in effect, from you, for you, from eternity past, O my son Steve, O my son Nick, O my son Ray, O my daughter Jen, O my daughter Dawn, Sylvia, O my son, O my son, O my son, O my son, O my daughter, O my son, O my son, O my son, O my daughter, though you deserve my curse, you will receive my blessing.

Listen, if you're not a Christian this morning, this is the invitation, right? I want to tell you there is nothing like this anywhere else in the world. There is no invitation like this.

[37 : 47] This is the invitation to come and experience the kind of love that you can never experience anywhere else. A love that is undeserved, that is unconditional, that is never frustrated, a love that has no equal, a love that can and will save you.

Not so much from the difficulties of this life, but from the hell of life without God now and eternally. Perhaps it's not too much of a stretch of our imaginations to think of an alternative ending to 2 Samuel 18 and 19.

You know, imagine at the beginning of 2 Samuel 18 as they're marching out to war, the Absalom just suddenly has an epiphany and he comes to his senses. What am I doing?

I'm a rebel against my father David. And so instead of marching out to war, he comes waving a white flag, shouting on his knees, I surrender, I surrender, I'm sorry.

And there he finds his father hanging between the gateposts in the place of judgment, shouting back, I forgive you, I love you, I've paid for your judgment. Well, it doesn't happen in 2 Samuel 18, but that's the gospel.

[38 : 58] You and I will wave the white flag to Jesus. I surrender, I give up, I'm sorry, I've lived my life as a rebel, I come to you. You will hear him shouting back, I love you, I forgive you, I've paid for your judgment.

Can I encourage you, if you've never done that before, do that this morning. Come to Christ and trust in him. And for those of you who've been Christians for years, the truth is the wonder of this should never fade.

That at the heart of your life is not your love for God or your love for others or your efforts in the church. This is the great reality that stands at the heart of our lives, that Christ, with a love that we don't deserve, died in our place for our sins.

The song we're about to sing goes like this. It says, Who could imagine so great a mercy? What heart could fathom such boundless grace? The God of ages stepped down from glory to wear my sin and bear my shame.

The cross has spoken. I am forgiven. The king of kings calls me his own. Beautiful savior. I'm yours forever. Jesus Christ, my living hope.

[40 : 15] Let me pray as I clean. Heavenly Father, your love for us is so unimaginably brilliant.

We couldn't have made it up. We do get in this life to experience the love of others, which is brilliant. The love of friends, of parents, of partners.

But nothing compares to this love, which spans such a great chasm of our rebellion against you, of creature and creator, of wicked sinner and holy God.

love has been so eternal and so long standing and so solid and certain. And so we thank you that Jesus in that great love died instead of us for our sin, that we might be forgiven.

And we rejoice in that love. Help us never to forget it. Never to pretend that there's anything that we could do to match it. But help us to revel in it and enjoy it.

[41 : 25] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.