

Protagonists Anonymous - Absalom

Opening

- Protagonists Anonymous... Minor roles. Major lessons.

2 Samuel 19:1-8//

Word soon reached Joab that the king was weeping and mourning for Absalom. 2 As all the people heard of the king's deep grief for his son, the joy of that day's victory was turned into deep sadness. 3 They crept back into the town that day as though they were ashamed and had deserted in battle. 4 The king covered his face with his hands and kept on crying, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

*5 Then Joab went to the king's room and said to him, "We saved your life today and the lives of your sons, your daughters, and your wives and concubines. Yet you act like this, making us feel ashamed of ourselves. 6 **You seem to love those who hate you and hate those who love you.** You have made it clear today that your commanders and troops mean nothing to you. It seems that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died, you would be pleased. 7 Now go out there and congratulate your troops, for I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a single one of them will remain here tonight. Then you will be worse off than ever before."*

8 So the king went out and took his seat at the town gate, and as the news spread throughout the town that he was there, everyone went to him.

Pray

Intro

- Protagonist does not always mean hero. The protagonist is not always the good guy.
 - One of my favorite genres of movies is the heist movie. I love to watch a good bank robbery... Baby Driver, Oceans 11-13, Bandit
 - Mobster movies (ie. Godfather, Scarface)
 - Villain movies where an already infamous villain gets to tell their side of the story (ie. Star Wars ep. 1-3, Maleficent, Joker).
- Absalom is far from a good guy:
 - Exploited the most vulnerable
 - Was known for his good looks and flowing locks.
 - Would intercept the complaints of the people before they reached the king so as to make the people think he was more compassionate.
 - Pretended to see people as equals, feigning to sacrifice his privilege for the sake of the vulnerable and weak.
 - Killed his brother.
 - Launch a violent uprising against his own father with the intention to kill.
 - Publicly defiled the women of the palace to shame his father. (PG version)
- None of us, when reading 2 Samuel 13-19, would consider Absalom the hero of any story, and yet, it says that King David *wept* when he died in battle (the battle he started against his own father!)
- This might sound crazy to us, but we do this all the time when we're watching movies... We sometimes find ourselves rooting for the ones we would normally call the "bad guys"

because the filmmakers have expertly humanized an enemy so that we are able to empathize with them.

- Tonight, I want to talk about how we can do this in real life. How we can turn the people we view as antagonists into protagonists... **How can we fulfill the demand of Christ to love our enemies?**

Empathy

- David makes him the protagonist of his own story...
 - Protagonist: A protagonist is the main character of a story. The protagonist is at the center of the story, makes the key decisions, and experiences the consequences of those decisions. The protagonist is the primary agent propelling the story forward, and is often the character who faces the most significant obstacles. (Wikipedia)
 - *To love our enemies is to make them the protagonist of their own story. To love our enemies is to walk in their shoes, keeping not only the decisions they've made in mind but also the obstacles that may have prevented a better way. It's to watch them as if they are the main character of their own story rather than the antagonist in yours. It's to root for them when they succeed and to mourn for them when they fail.*
- We're up against a difficult climate for loving our enemies right now in America. Our current context is not just one of polarization, but of demonization. We've been politically polarized for quite some time. But now we've surpassed that... Now, if we disagree with a person we must demonize them.
- **When we demonize our enemies we forget their humanity. Demonizing is de-humanizing.**
 - Here's the risk of living like this... **Demonizing people distracts us from fighting the real battle against the real enemy, the devil himself.**
- Eph. 6:12// *For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*
 - Getting us to hate one another is not just a Russian social media strategy, it's the strategy of the devil.
 - What he wants us doing is destroying one another rather than destroying the principalities that are pulling the strings behind the flesh and blood.
 - If there's a politician that you have demonized... ask yourself what exactly is it that they are doing that you are against. Then ask the HS how you can effectively fight against the underlying principality by naming what it is.
 - When Jesus called Peter "Satan," he wasn't name calling, he was differentiating the demonic principality from the person.

- **Demonizing the person does nothing to win the spiritual battle.** Once we've been able to separate the person from the principalities that actually oppose us, then we can go on loving that person and fighting battles against those actual demons.
- If loving your enemy seems like too tall an order, let me just remind you of this... **You were once an enemy of God, and God loved you despite.**
 - Romans 5:10 // *while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son*
 - If we were to keep reading, we would see that God not only reconciles us to Himself but he goes so far as to call us His sons and daughters (Romans 8:16)
- **But Jesus didn't just die so we could be reconciled to him, he also lived so that we can be reconciled to one another.**
 - Phil 2: 5-7// You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.
 - **Before Christ died for us, He made himself human for us... In other words, he supernaturally empathized. God put himself in our shoes.**
- In order to love our enemies, we have to see them first as humans. As protagonists for their own stories rather than antagonists in ours.

Boundaries

- 2 Sam. 19:5-6// Then Joab went to the king's room and said to him, "We saved your life today and the lives of your sons, your daughters, and your wives and concubines. Yet you act like this, making us feel ashamed of ourselves. **6** You seem to love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that your commanders and troops mean nothing to you. It seems that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died, you would be pleased.
 - When we empathize with the enemy, it will cause confusion. It won't make sense to on-lookers.
 - The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8)
 - The Pharisees and religious teachers thought they could trap Jesus by testing the limits of his empathy... Instead, Jesus defended the woman.
 - If we are going to be like Christ, we need to defend the humanity of our enemies. **We need to humanize** even (and especially) **when the on-lookers would expect us demonize.**
- **But just because God calls us to defend our enemy doesn't mean he calls us to leave ourselves defenseless.**

- v. 7// *Now go out there and congratulate your troops, for I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a single one of them will remain here tonight. Then you will be worse off than ever before.*
- **David was thinking of his son, while Joab (the general of his army) was thinking of his safety.**
 - What makes it difficult to love our enemy is that our instinct to protect ourselves overpowers the imperative to love. Some of us are a little more Joab than David...
But there are others of us, who identify with the enemy to the point where it becomes dangerous.
- **God calls us to defend the humanity of our enemies *and* to defend the contents of our own hearts.**
 - Prov. 4:23// Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.
- What do we need to defend?
 - Our vulnerabilities, our conscience, our character...
- Defend Your Vulnerabilities
 - Sometimes we don't like people because of the way they expose our weaknesses and push our buttons.
 - Anger/ resentment, jealousy, sensitivity to criticism
 - **We have to take Joab's advice, even as we empathize with our enemies, to build defenses around our proclivities to sinfulness (our buttons)**
 - Sometimes you have to "unfollow" a person to protect your ability to see that person as human.
 - ie. The bucket list family
 - Disclaimer: This is a defensive move, not offensive. The goal is to recognize your own sinfulness and guard against it, not to attack other people for their sin.
- Protect Your Conscience
 - After Jesus defends the humanity of the woman who committed adultery, he turned to her and said "sin no more."
 - **Though he defended her humanity, he did not defend her sin.**
 - We still have to draw boundaries in our lives around what is right and wrong... **If we're not careful, we can love our enemies in a way that corrupts our conscience.**
 - 1 Cor. 15:33// Bad company corrupts good character [morals]
 - Fraternizing with the enemy.
 - We're bad at balancing empathy with boundaries when it comes to our conscience, but we do it naturally when we're watching movies with "bad guy" protagonists... We may empathize with the bad guy, we may even root for them, but we never use their actions to justify robbing a bank ourselves.

- Our conscience is a human, internal mechanism of justice (right and wrong), but because it is human it is sometimes flawed. Sometimes we draw boundaries around “truth” that seems right to us but isn’t. We must always invite the Holy Spirit to calibrate our conscience regularly. And sometimes he uses our enemies to calibrate us.

- Protect Your Character
 - Sometimes we need to create boundaries between us and our enemies, not because they push our buttons, not because they corrupt our conscience, but because they jeopardize our influence.

 - v. 6// “You have made it clear today that your commanders and troops mean nothing to you.”
 - David’s troops weren’t just confused they were disheartened. David had failed his responsibility to them.
 - David, even though he had a responsibility to his son, Absalom, also had a responsibility to his troops.

 - Paul gives the same advice to two young leaders in his epistles (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:5) to be above reproach
 - It’s instructive that he gives this commandment to leaders and not just the average person... What that tells us is that **the command to live above reproach is more about our influence than it is our reputation.**
 - **To put a boundary between you and an enemy for the sake of your reputation is selfish. To put a boundary between you and an enemy for the sake of the vulnerable people in your life is responsible stewardship of your influence.**
 - Parents... If there’s someone in your life that you’re trying to love but they are bad for your kids, you need to draw a boundary.
 - We are called to accept, affirm, and embrace the humanity of our enemies. But if our embrace corrupts the conscience of the people we lead, we are responsible for that.
 - It doesn’t mean you stop embracing, it means you embrace more responsibly and strategically.

 - Though you might not consider yourself a leader, we all have some sphere of influence.

Forgiveness

- The fact that David mourned the death of his son goes to show that he still had hope of reconciliation.
 - reconciliation - the desire to reunite in relationship

- As Christians, reconciliation is our main ministry...

- 2 Corinthians 5:15,19// “[Jesus] died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will **no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ...For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.**
 - We can afford to forgive our enemies when we realize who the real protagonist of the story is.

- We rejoice at the end of a movie when the enemy gets what's coming to him (usually no desire for reconciliation). We feel that way because the movie is ultimately about the protagonist, and **the antagonist is just a disposable obstacle in the way of what the protagonist wants.**
- **We tend to see ourselves as the protagonists and our enemies as disposable obstacles in the way of what we want... But we are not the protagonist of the story.**
- If God is the main character of the story, then what he wants is not for any enemy to "get his in the end." What he wants is reconciliation with his enemies. So, if we are living as ambassadors of Christ in the world, then we can see no human being as a disposable obstacle.
- **If we are letting unforgiveness keep us from reconciling with others, then it's us who is the obstacle of what God wants.**
- To love our enemies we've got to have a heart of reconciliation. And that desire will lead us to forgive.

[Band]

- David is known as a man after God's own heart... How could that be when he was so sinful? What do we see in David's heart that reflects the heart of God?
- Absalom is not the first of David's enemies that he loved... Saul... Ishobeth (Saul's son).
 - **Empathy for the enemy is a pattern in David's life and one that reflects the heart of God. In the same way that David was always so eager to forgive, so is God.**
- **Maybe God was able to forgive so much of David's sin because David was so willing to forgive the sins of others.**
- Just after Jesus preaches to "love your enemy" at the Sermon on the Plain he also preaches about judgment and forgiveness...
 - Luke 6:38// *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*
- Is there an enemy in your life you cannot forgive? Someone in your life who you cannot stop judging?
 - It may be true that the person does not deserve your forgiveness, but neither did you. And the way that you were forgiven, pressed down, shaken, running over... is the way you are called to forgive!
- It's impossible to love your enemy until you realize you are an enemy of God yourself, and have been loved by him despite.