

WHEN UNFORGIVENESS BEGS FOR MERCY

by Carter Conlon

Lazarus had died and the family buried him in a tomb. Four days later Jesus stood on the hillside and with a loud voice called Lazarus out of the grave. At the sound of Christ's voice, Lazarus immediately came out. His movement must have been greatly restricted because he was bound with grave clothes, so Jesus sent messengers to untie him and let him go.

Many of you reading this have heard the voice of Christ calling you and have responded by coming out of the grave of sin and death. Though it may be true that you are alive in Christ, there are certain issues that have intricately woven themselves into your life, issues that must be untied so that you can truly be free. This is why this message is so important for you to hear and understand. The enemy works in very subtle ways and somewhere along the journey you allowed a seed to be planted in your heart that was not of Christ. This seed has begun to grow and it has now interwoven itself around the very essence of who you are. When this happens, you create a false religious system to counteract your lack of true freedom. The human heart has the ability to take something evil, refashion it, and begin to call it good. Instead of recognizing it as death, you tragically begin to call it life. As you read this today, I pray you will receive what the Lord has given me, as a messenger, to help unwrap things in your life that are not from God.

■ JOAB—A MAN DECEIVED BY THE ENEMY

Let's look in the Old Testament at the life of a man named Joab. Joab was a son of King David's sister Zeruiah, and David had made him the captain of his army. But Joab had certain things in his heart that were never dealt with, and over time they became the source of a deception which ultimately killed him. The psalmist in Psalm 10:4 speaks about just such a man: *"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."* There was a dangerous mixture in Joab that led him to keep God in some of his thoughts but not in all of them. He could not see what was happening to his own heart because he had chosen to allow certain things to continue to abide there.

In verses 5–10, the psalmist continues to describe the kind of man Joab became: *"His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth him-*

self, that the poor may fall by his strong ones." "Strong ones" here literally means by his own strength. Joab became a man who began to live by his own might. The judgments of God were put out of his sight because he thought he would not face any adversity. He began to speak arrogantly and fraudulently, with deceit easily flowing from him.

■ A DISHONORABLE DEATH

"Although he had not followed Absalom earlier, Joab had also joined Adonijah's revolt. When Joab heard about Adonijah's death, he ran to the sacred tent of the Lord and caught hold of the horns of the altar. When news of this reached King Solomon, he sent Benaiah son of Jehoiada to execute him. Benaiah went into the sacred tent of the Lord and said to Joab, 'The king orders you to come out!' But Joab answered, 'No, I will die here.' So Benaiah returned to the king and told him what Joab had said. 'Do as he said,' the king replied. 'Kill him there beside the altar and bury him. This will remove the guilt of his senseless murders from me and from my father's family. Then the Lord will repay him for the murders of two men who were more righteous and better than he. For my father was no party to the deaths of Abner son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. May Joab and his descendants be forever guilty of these murders, and may the Lord grant peace to David and his descendants and to his throne forever.' So Benaiah son of

Jehoiada returned to the sacred tent and killed Joab, and Joab was buried at his home in the wilderness” (1 Kings 2:28-34 NLT).

What brought him on such a journey and to such a dishonorable death?

This passage of scripture portrays the terrible end of a man whom history should have recorded as a mighty man of God. During the reign of King David, Joab led David's armies to many victories. The mighty men of God listed include Joab's brother, and even an armor bearer, but there is no mention of Joab. Now at the end of his days, we find this man Joab clinging to an altar, seeking for mercy. He had led the army and won marvelous battles, yet he was seeking a mercy which he had not given and that had finally departed from him. What was it that had gotten into this man's heart? What brought him on such a journey and to such a dishonorable death? This man appeared to have wholeheartedly served the king. He was a man of courage, unafraid to fight; he was a man of whom one could say, “This is a good man; this is a powerful man.”

Now keep in mind, only a short season later Solomon built the temple where the glory of God came, and this man, Joab, had he lived long enough, and lived honorably, would have been there to see this glory. But, instead, he's holding to the horns of an altar, begging for mercy, and the mercy is denied him. James said in chapter 2:13, “*For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy...*”

■ UNFORGIVENESS THAT TURNS TO BITTERNESS

You have to ask the question, “What had gotten into this man's

life that eventually destroyed him?” I believe unforgiveness became a part of Joab's life and it ultimately turned into a destroying root of bitterness. Hebrews 12:15 tells us that bitterness is a root and if it grows deep in a person's heart and life, it will defile them and eventually lead them away from the grace of God. In the early process it begins to intertwine itself into your character and ultimately it will pervert the true judgments of God.

Many people never grow in grace or give honor to God because they refuse inwardly to forgive those who have wronged them. In Matthew 6:14–15 Jesus says, “*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” Most people are willing to embrace God's forgiveness, but they are not as willing to offer the same grace to those that have wronged them. We want mercy for ourselves but judgment for others. However, I want to suggest to you that forgiveness is not an option but a commandment of God. We will not fully know what it is to walk in the glory of God without forgiving others. Looking at the life of Joab, we find that unforgiveness led to a bitter root of defilement in him.

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■ THE START OF A ROOT OF BITTERNESS

You then have to ask a second question, “Where did Joab's unforgiveness begin?” The scripture shows us that it began in his heart when Abner killed his brother Asahel in battle.

“The battle that day was very fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's men.

The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him. Abner looked behind him and asked, ‘Is that you, Asahel?’ ‘It is,’ he answered. Then Abner said to him, ‘Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the young men and strip him of his weapons.’ But Asahel would not stop chasing him. Again Abner warned Asahel, ‘Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?’ But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit; so Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot. And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died” (2 Samuel 2:17–23).

■ QUESTIONING THE KING'S JUDGMENT

As time progresses, Abner, David's former enemy, had a sense in his heart that David was called to be king over all of God's people. So he came to David and scripture says, “*Then Abner said to David, ‘Let me go and call all the people of Israel to your side. They will make a covenant with you to make you their king. Then you will be able to rule over everything your heart desires.’ So David sent Abner safely on his way” (2 Samuel 3:21, NLT).* Abner can be likened to new Christians. Once they were enemies of the King but then are changed and the call of God is on their lives. These people have a great potential to bring many with them into the kingdom.

When Joab heard that Abner had come to see David and was sent away in peace, instead of rejoicing with King David, he began to question David's judgment. “*When Joab was told that Abner had just been there visiting the king and had been sent away in safety, he rushed to see the king. ‘What have you done?’ he*

demanded. 'What do you mean by letting Abner get away?'" (2 Samuel 3:23–24).

Joab could only see circumstances from the viewpoint of a man who had an unsundered grievance against another person. We see this today. There are people who may have wronged you, and in your heart there's this sense of a grievance with God. You see them go to church and worship God and you believe it is a pretense of drawing close to Him. This was in Joab's heart. He was implying that Abner's visit was all a show and there was no truth in it.

■ FALSE VALUE SYSTEM

Joab then took matters into his own hands and sent messengers after Abner, and in verse 27 we see that Abner came back to him. Abner's guard was down, as he believed they were on the same path. Joab took him aside and began to speak with him quietly under the guise of friendship, and then stabbed him under the fifth rib, which is right into his heart.

That is what bitter and unforgiving people do. They have a false value system which allows them to wound others at will, believing there will be no consequences. How many people have been turned away from the Church because of a Joab that feels he or she can speak anything to anybody that they want, and somehow there will be no consequence? They take their sword as it were even the Word of God, and use it as a weapon to hurt innocent people.

■ PERVERTED CAUSES

The scripture shows us that as Joab continued on, he showed strength for causes that he deemed just. Joab carried on to fight the enemies of David, saying to the men of Judah, *"Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth him good"* (2 Samuel 10:12). These are words

of a man who seems to be a warrior fighting on the side of the king. Again in 2 Samuel 12:27–28, the Bible tells us that Joab continued to conquer in the king's name. He sent word to David and told him to fight the last battle before the city fell so David would have the glory. He was zealous for truth, but had this unrighteous root manifesting through him at the same time. Keep in mind that these two things are going on simultaneously in this man's life. The root of righteousness is drying up, and the root of bitterness is going deeper into his character. That is why some Christians are very confusing people in the house of God.

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■ LOSING THE FEAR OF GOD

Following the progression of Joab, we see that he lost the fear of touching even those closest to the king's heart. David wanted Absalom, his son who was in rebellion, returned to him safely. But what did Joab do? He found this young man caught up in his own foolishness, and he thrust him through his heart with a spear. He did not bring him home to the king. Joab was now living under a false sense of right and wrong. When David found out that his son Absalom was dead, he began to mourn and cry out for him. When Joab found out the king was weeping over his action in killing Absalom, he went into the tent and rebuked the king openly. His arrogance had gone beyond just sitting in judgment, and he was now emboldened in his rebellion. Because of this, David had no alternative but to replace Joab as captain of his army. In 2 Samuel 20, David called Amasa to replace Joab. Unbelievably, Joab looked at this man, Amasa, and as he

recognized him as a threat to his own position, he assassinated him. His conscience was now completely gone.

■ BLIND TO THE TRUTH

In 2 Samuel 20:19–20, when Joab was about to attack a city, a woman of Israel leaned over the wall, and said, *"I'm a mother of Israel. Will you come in and destroy God's heritage?"* Joab replied with these strange words, *"...Far be it from me that I should swallow up or destroy."* He no longer saw himself for what he was. He was deluded spiritually. He had just thrust the sword into the side of Amasa, yet he viewed himself as a completely righteous man on a path of truth.

■ SIDING WITH THE REBELLIOUS

Joab was now completely blind. As a man given to rebellion, Joab no longer recognized rebellion in others, as in the case of Adonijah, who wanted to rule as king instead of David, his father. He would have formerly killed a man who rebelled against the king, and here he was joining him. Joab was in direct disobedience against God, and so God began to deal with him. *"Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself (Adonijah was Absalom's brother), saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped him...And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zoheleth (which means the stone of a serpent), which is by En-rogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the men of Judah the king's servants"* (1 Kings 1:59). God had already spoken through David that Solomon was to be the next king. Joab finally ended up sitting at this table of idolatry, worshipping and serving the wrong king.

■ MISSING THE GLORY OF GOD

Had Joab remained loyal to David, he would have known that God was

about to reveal His glory in a new temple Solomon was to build. God was about to manifest a glory so profound that all flesh would have to bow. Even the Queen of Sheba became breathless at the splendor and glory of all God had done.

Just as Joab clung to the horns of the altar, unforgiveness will cling and try to hold on.

Now, beloved, you must understand that before the glory could come, Joab, who had become the very epitome of bitterness and rebellion, who offended the very nature of God, had to be removed. Can you imagine if God was about to manifest His glory in a physical sanctuary, but you had to be removed from His presence before He would come? What a terrifying prospect that God would look down and say, "I want to send my glory, but first I've got to get you out of here, because you will not let go of your bitterness and will pervert my house." If the glory of the Lord is going to touch your temple, and we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, unforgiveness must die. Just as Joab clung to the horns of the altar, unforgiveness will cling and try to hold on. Finally, King Solomon's men came into the temple, killed Joab, and buried him in his own house in the wilderness.

■ JOAB, A TYPE OF THE ROOT OF BITTERNESS, MUST DIE

Joab knew what was right, but he headed down a pathway which he had misconstrued as truth. That's the strange condition of the human heart. You can hear truth and say, "God

forbid, that is an awful thing." But it doesn't necessarily mean that your own heart will be brought into line with God's Word. Ask yourself these simple questions, "What did we do with what we knew? Did we let it grip our hearts and respond to it? Did we move in the direction of truth?" The choice is yours.

■ GOD SENT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO SET YOU FREE

The good news is the glory of God no longer comes into a man-made physical temple. We are now the temple of God. God wants to manifest His glory in your temple, but this unforgiveness must be taken away. God cannot come where there are roots of bitterness that have not been dealt with. Put Joab to death this day, show him no mercy, and do not let him plead for his life any longer. Let him be slain by the power of God. God will not share His glory with another. Your temple has to be clean, ready, and in agreement with God. You must let these grievances go. Pray for your enemies, those who have wounded you, that they find grace. Pray until God's burden for them becomes your burden. God is not indifferent to what has been done to you, but He took the punishment upon Himself that you may be free from the chains and the grievances that produce death. Unwrap those grave clothes that have been interwoven into your life and walk out into the glorious liberty of those set free by Christ.

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

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