

¹ *In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him.* ² *He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, “What town are you from?” He would answer, “Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.”* ³ *Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you.”* ⁴ *And Absalom would add, “If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice.”*

⁵ *Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him.* ⁶ *Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*

⁷ *At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, “Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the LORD.”* ⁸ *While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: ‘If the LORD takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron.’”*

⁹ *The king said to him, “Go in peace.” So he went to Hebron.*

¹⁰ *Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.’”* ¹¹ *Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter.* ¹² *While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom’s following kept on increasing.* (NIV84)

A GOOD NAME IS YOUR MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION

Do you like your name? The name your parent’s gave you – do you like it? Some people do? Some people don’t? Some people use their middle name, because they like it better. Some insist that others use their nick name, because that’s the name they’d like to be known by. People feel differently about their birth name.

But how do you feel about your good name – your reputation? That’s a bit more universal, isn’t it? We desire to have a good name – a good reputation. At work, if you are the one who is known as the hard worker, your boss is going to notice that, right? And certainly that bodes well for you. If your neighbors understand your good character, you’ll be trusted and respected, something that everyone wants, right?

Today we are going to see how **A Good Name is Your Most Precious Possession**. It takes a long time to build up that reputation and it can be lost so easily. That’s why God defends our reputation and protects it in the 8th Commandment.

2 Samuel 15:1-12

Though David certainly taught his son Absalom the 10 Commandments when he was a boy, this story tells the sad truth that the quest for power and advancement in the kingdom corrupted Absalom to the point that he spread lies about his father to try to turn the tides of Israel against David and into his favor. He made up stories and cast his father the king in a bad light so that he would be seen as the sympathetic and loving leader and his father as aloof and clueless. And sadly it was working. The people latched on to the political maneuvering of Absalom and began to be a bit disgruntled with David as their king.

We find ourselves smack dab in between the primary and the general elections, which means it's "fast and furious campaigning" season! It's hard to escape the ads and mailings and posters that the politicians have created and are distributing. Have you ever stopped to consider how nearly every political campaign and for some nearly every ad they print or produce tramples the 8th Commandment. Instead of running on my own merits, I have to tell you how much a schmuck the next guy is and how much of a fool you'd be to vote for him. We get so immune to the mudslinging that we pick up some mud and start hurling it in the direction of the ones we've deemed unworthy. Because we've had any experience with those people? Usually not! Most often because the candidate we like started the mud fight and so we stand right at their side and sling the mud along with them.

In his explanation of the 8th Commandment Martin Luther wrote: "***We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.***"

These are words that we do well to take to heart, especially in an election cycle. Even the candidates that we aren't voting for. Even those who take up a stance that we disagree with, maybe the leaders that were elected in spite of our voting for someone else...Are we taking words and actions in the kindest possible way? Or do we get riled up by the media reports or what the media fails to report and end up tossing the 8th Commandment aside.

That's what Absalom did! He tossed the 8th commandment aside, (and the 4th Commandment too, by the way) because they didn't line up with what he desired. He wanted the throne that his father David sat on, and so he dragged his reputation through the mud to get it. He started mudslinging, first subtly, then pretty boldly. He made the people to think that David had no interest in giving them justice – he was too busy doing other things. But he would take the time for them. He would see to it that justice was served. He loved the people enough to put them first. Is this sounding familiar? Does this sound like every campaign you've ever heard?

It's interesting that Absalom's name means ***my father is peace***. "My father is peace" was waging a silent, yet progressively louder war against his father. And eventually it worked – sort of. He got his father to leave Jerusalem. He chased David from the throne and began ruling in his place. But it didn't end well for Absalom either. As his mule traveled under some thick branches, his long flowing hair got stuck in the tree and the mule continued, leaving him dangling in the air. A few of David's men found him like that and they put an end to his life and the rebellion by driving 3 javelins through his heart.

So Absalom who led a violent revolt met his violent end. The natural consequence of the life that he had chosen for himself. There are not a ton of people today who feel sorry for him. He made some arrogant and sinful choices and so he met the end that he deserved.

2 Samuel 15:1-12

But before we pass too much judgment, let's remember how much like Absalom we really are. Have you ever lied to embellish a story to make others think more of you? Have you ever exaggerated a story so that you come out looking better? Ever told of the wrongs that someone else committed against you in an effort to win people to your side and turn them against someone else. Ever listened when someone else tried to speak that way to you? We don't always take words and actions in the kindest possible way. We don't always obey or respect our elected officials the way we should. When someone has made us upset, we care nothing of their reputation, but feel rather justified in gossiping and slandering their name to any ears that are willing to be open to our complaints. We think the worst of people and the only ones we think deserve the benefit of the doubt are ourselves.

We've failed to obey the 8th Commandment as much as Absalom and we deserve his fate. We deserve to be strung up in that tree and to have spears poke through our skin. We deserve a painful end for the pain that we have caused to others and to our God with our sin. We deserve the angry wrath of the one we've sinned against, for sure. We deserve death and hell for our sins against our neighbor and against God. But that's not what we are given. Instead, we are set free. Set free because another took our place and became our substitute. Though we were the sinful rebels, we are given pardon. Though we make daily war with God, we are given peace. Though we drag others' reputations and in the process God's reputation through the mud, we are set free from punishment. Set free by one who kept this law for us. Jesus knows what it means to be falsely accused, to be slandered, and to have lies thrown out against him. But he didn't react the way we do. Instead he silently endured. He tolerated the injustice, even when they sentenced him to an unjust death. And even on the cross he took the words and actions of those who were torturing him in the kindest possible way and prayed, "***Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.***" He kept the 8th Commandment perfectly and remained perfect in every way. So that he could give that perfection to you and me.

Jesus gave us his perfection and took instead our traitor's death. He allowed himself to be strung up in a tree for us. He willingly received the nails and the spear for us, all things that should have been our fate, so that we could be forgiven. He died so that we could live. Though his name was perfect, he took our sinful name and our sinful blame and took it with him to death.

Though we deserve the bad name we have earned for ourselves – *gossip, traitor, sinner*, our Jesus has cleansed us from that former way of life. He gives us full and free forgiveness. He gives us a new name: *forgiven, redeemed, child of God, saint*. No longer are our lives like Absalom, but now we are made to be like Jesus.

And how do we respond to this new identity? We can't help but thank God with our lives. We can't help but strive to obey him. We long to be the one that has the good reputation because we know that this reflects well on whose we are. We strive to be the Christ that God has made us to be, that others ***might see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.*** In an effort to be like Jesus, we want to uphold the 8th Commandment by upholding and defending others reputations. We long for others to keep the good name that God has given them. We do it by speaking well of others. We do it by giving the benefit of the doubt, we do it by standing up for them when others are trying to drag their names down. We uphold this command of our God when we close our ears to gossip and loving ask others to stop when it comes our way. That's the way you'd want others to treat your name right? So it's the way we can show Christ like love to those around us. And it's the way that we can worship God as we strive to obey this and every command he's given us.

2 Samuel 15:1-12

Peter gives some godly advice. IN response to God's love, we can show love to others like Peter directs us, *“live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called.”* (1 Peter 3:8-9)

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”
(Proverbs 22:1) **A Good Name is Your Most Precious Possession.** Thank God for the good name he's given you and strive to help others keep theirs – to their benefit to the glory of the holy name of our God. To him be all glory. Amen.