



Please turn to 2 Samuel 16 (page 249, pew Bible). The title of today's sermon is:

***POWER GRAB, Part Two:
In the Presence of My Enemies***

2 Samuel 16

If you were with us last week, you'll recall that David is on the run from his son Absalom, who has conspired against his father in an attempt to usurp the throne. Through political cunning, Absalom has deceived the men of Israel and has gained a groundswell of support. Absalom is on the move, and King David is on the run. As he flees Jerusalem with his household and a contingent of soldiers who remain loyal to him as the rightful king, David is sustained by three encounters with faithful comrades including Ittai the Gittite, Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and Hushai the Archite who is called "David's friend."

Now in chapter 16, the focus shifts to three of David's enemies. Each represents a type of enemy that we're likely to encounter and that our Lord Jesus encountered during his days on earth. Christians can be comforted to know that *God uses even our enemies to fulfill his good purposes for us.*

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It's hard to see this when we're walking through a storm of trouble. But God's word is our compass, and it was written to encourage us, to get us through the storm and to keep us calm and level-headed in the midst of it. With that in mind, let's look at the types of enemies that David encountered.

**ZIBA:
The Ready Opportunist**

(vv. 1-4)

¹ When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine.

² And the king said to Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" Ziba answered, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink." ³ And the king said, "And where is your master's son?" Ziba said to the king, "Behold, he remains in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father.'" ⁴ Then the king said to Ziba,

“Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.” And Ziba said, “I pay homage; let me ever find favor in your sight, my lord the king.”

- 2 Samuel 16:1-4

At first glance Ziba appears to be David’s friend, and Mephibosheth seems to have become David’s enemy. But later, in chapter 19, we’ll see that Ziba’s allegation about Mephibosheth is quite different from what Mephibosheth tells David. Everything we know about Mephibosheth, combined with subtle clues about Ziba, suggests that Ziba is lying. He appears to be generous but is nothing more than a ready opportunist: *someone who exploits circumstances to gain an advantage instead of being guided by ethical principles.*

When Ziba brings David a load of provisions, “the king [says] to Ziba, ‘Why have you brought these?’” (v. 2a). Literally, David says, “What are you doing with these things?” Do they really belong to Ziba. Are they his to give? After all, the narrator introduces Ziba in verse 1 as “the servant of Mephibosheth.” Remember, back in chapter 9, Ziba had been appointed by King David to look after the property he had given to Mephibosheth, the lame grandson of Saul. Had Ziba run off with Mephibosheth’s stuff?

Ziba doesn’t answer the question, but simply tells David what the supplies are for: The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is for those who become exhausted in the wilderness.

Upon hearing Ziba’s reply, David asks another question: “Where is your master’s son?” Back in chapter 9, Ziba is called “a servant of the house of Saul” (2 Sam. 9:2). David never asked him to give up that role but to care for Saul’s grandson Mephibosheth. So, David’s follow-up question may be his way of asking, “And where is the owner of all this stuff you’re so generously giving us?”

Ziba takes this opportunity to throw Mephibosheth under the bus, saying, “He stayed in Jerusalem and said, ‘Now I’ll get back the kingdom of my grandfather Saul.’” But that makes no sense. The groundswell is for *Absalom’s* kingship, not for Saul’s descendants. And Absalom would certainly treat Mephibosheth no better than David did.

David should have pressed Ziba further and gotten to the bottom of the story. But it’s late, so much has happened so fast, and David is so exhausted, that he doesn’t seem to be thinking straight. He gets taken in by Ziba’s ploy and gives him Mephibosheth’s property. Ziba then finishes his performance with a flourish, bowing before King David. It’s worth noting that back in 2 Samuel 9, Mephibosheth repeatedly paid homage to David (9:6, 8), but Ziba didn’t. But now that he has benefited greatly by deceiving the king, he bows before him.¹

Yet we find out later, in chapter 19, that Ziba did not continue on with David but went back to Jerusalem. Ziba probably had a hunch that David would somehow survive the conspiracy and eventually return to Jerusalem as king, which is why Ziba shows support for David here. But suppose Absalom’s conspiracy is successful and he becomes king?

¹ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, Preaching the Word, series editor R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 402-404.

No problem! Ziba isn't off with King David, here's right in the city of Jerusalem ready to welcome Absalom as the new king. As far as Absalom would know, Ziba had never left. Ziba knows how to manipulate any given situation to suit his own advantage. So, he is not a faithful friend but a ready opportunist.

Even though Ziba's motives and methods were sinful, God still providentially used those provisions to sustain David and his household. Likewise, the Lord can use people in our lives who pretend to be our friends but only for the sake of gaining some advantage, of deriving some sort of benefit from their relationship with us. Like David, we can be duped by their apparent kindness, generosity and encouragement. But that's okay. While the Lord wants us to be discerning, he knows we can't read people's hearts. And we're not to judge their motives. But we can draw comfort from knowing that God is sovereign over their sin and can use their perceived kindness to serve his good purposes for us.

**SHIMEI:
The Relentless Critic
(vv. 5-14)**

⁵ When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually. ⁶ And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. ⁷ And Shimei said as he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man!" ⁸ The Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood."

- 2 Samuel 5-8

There's no question where this guy stood with David. Nobody said, "C'mon, Shimei, don't beat around the bush. Tell us how you *really* feel about David!" No, sirree! Shimei made no bones about his hatred for David. He assaulted him both physically and verbally. "His vile words were supported with violent actions."²

Shimei's assault began when David reached Bahurim, a village about one and a half miles northeast of Jerusalem. Bahurim is where Paltiel had been forced to abandon his wife Michal as she was being taken to David. Paltiel had wept the whole way there. Bahurim became a place of weeping once again – this time for David and his household – as the fugitives continued on their way from Jerusalem toward the Jordan valley.³

The journey was made all the more difficult because of Shimei's relentless criticism and cursing as he threw stones at King David and the men surrounding him. It's been said that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." That's simply not true. Words can be dangerous and damaging, and that was certainly the case here – especially since there was a measure of truth to them.

² Ibid., 405.

³ Ibid., 404

Although Shimei was wrong in thinking that David was accursed for shedding the blood of Saul's household, David was in fact under the Lord's discipline for shedding the blood of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. Shimei yelled, "Get out! Get out!" That's exactly what David was doing – getting out of Jerusalem. Shimei called him a "worthless man" – and we sort of felt the same way about David as we saw how he behaved with Bathsheba and Uriah.

Shimei's assault was relentless. He kept hurling curses and rocks at David and his men. At one point David's nephew had had enough. "Then Abishai ... said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take his head off'" (v. 9). That would definitely solve the problem! People without heads don't criticize or curse!⁴

¹⁰ But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'"¹¹ And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. ¹² It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today." ¹³ So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust. ¹⁴ And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself.

- 2 Samuel 16:10-14

Shimei's relentless assault made David's journey all the more difficult and wearisome. But he saw God's hand in it. When David said, "Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to," David wasn't suggesting that God commanded Shimei to curse. He was responsible for his own vile words, violent actions and the hateful spirit behind them. Nevertheless, David could see God's purpose in it. When David confessed his sin in Psalm 51, he said to the Lord, "You're the one I've sinned against, and you've seen it all, the full extent of my evil. You have all the facts before you; whatever you decide about me is fair" (v. 4 paraphrased). By allowing Shimei's attack to continue, David was bowing beneath the rod of discipline. "David was assured of immediate forgiveness but warned of ongoing consequences," and he saw "Shimei's abuse [as] part of those consequences."⁵

David left the matter in the Lord's hands, saying, "Maybe God will see my affliction and exchange the curses for something good" (2 Sam. 16:12, paraphrased). David's response reveals a lot about his perspective, his view of God. Dale Davis writes,

David has a deep-seated confidence in a God of unguessable grace, who has a tendency to replace cursing with good-ness. ... How can he even dream this unless he actually knows a God like that? You just can't imagine how deep and warm and longing God's compassion is for you even when he disciplines you for your sin. But David would try, because he knew him. ...

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, reprinted 2018), 203.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

What an instinct for God. What a holy hunch! Should this word not come as special hope to Christians ... who at some point, sometimes with open eyes, have smashed God's commandments and defied his standards and then suffered miserably for it? Repentance and forgiveness have come yet they are sure God only regards them with grudging toleration, and sometimes they doubt the toleration. They are, they think, doomed to the junk yard of Christian existence. But what if they get a glimpse of David's God? ... What if they have a God who can look at guilt and return good?

Shimei is the man who curses, but David has told us that Yahweh is the God who may reverse the curse. In fact, he has (Gal. 3:13).⁶

But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

- Galatians 3:13 NLT

When Jesus Christ hung on the cross, he became a curse for us and he dissolved the curse for us. For this reason Paul writes in Romans 8,

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

- Romans 8:31-35

The answer is: *no one!* "Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39, NLT, CSB; see also 1 Pet. 2:12).

There was yet another enemy that opposed David, perhaps the most hurtful of all. We read about him in chapter 15. As David went up the Mount of Olives, barefoot, weeping as he went, "it was told David, 'Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom'" (v. 31).

AHITHOPHEL: The Ruthless Traitor

(vv. 15-23)

¹⁵ Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. ¹⁶ And when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

¹⁷ And Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" ¹⁸ And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, for whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. ¹⁹ And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you."

⁶ Ibid., 205-206.

²⁰ Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give your counsel. What shall we do?"

²¹ Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened."

²² So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. ²³ Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.

- 2 Samuel 16:15-23

Amid this tsunami of treachery and conspiracy stands David's true friend, Hushai the Archite. Remember, when David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives and was told that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom, he prayed, "O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel to foolishness" (2 Sam. 15:31). Then as David reached the summit, he was met by Hushai his friend. This was clearly an answer to prayer. David told Hushai to go back to the city to work against Absalom by pretending to serve as his advisor. So, that's precisely what Hushai does.

But if you look carefully at his words, there's definitely some double-speak going on! Hushai says to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" But this is his wish for David, not Absalom. "In the very act of appearing to celebrate Absalom as king, Hushai was already working hard to save King David's life."⁷ When Absalom asks Hushai, "Why didn't you go with your friend?", Hushai goes on to say, "As I have served your father, so I will serve you." That's how it reads in the ESV. But more literally, the Hebrew says, "As I have served in the presence of your father, so I will serve in your presence." Hushai will serve in Absalom's presence, but he won't be serving Absalom. Hushai will be serving David! He was indeed David's friend.

But not so Ahithophel. When Absalom asks Ahithophel, "What should I do now?", he says, "Have sex with your father's concubines." So, Absalom pitched a tent on the palace roof – the same roof where David had gazed on Bathsheba – and Absalom pitched a tent and had sex with them in broad daylight. Everyone in Israel knew about it. John Woodhouse writes,

It is difficult to imagine anything more calculated to offend, disrespect, and hurt David than Ahithophel's cool (cold-blooded would be more accurate) counsel that Absalom have sex with each of his father's concubines. It was not simply that such an act would be understood as a claim to David's throne.... Absalom had already claimed to be king. It was the father-son relationship that made the advice in this case particularly crude. It involved what God's Law called "uncovering his father's nakedness" (Leviticus 18:8; 20:11; Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20; cf. Genesis 9:23; Ezekiel 22:10). It was "an irreversible act of the utmost provocation comparable even to rape."⁸

⁷ Woodhouse, 414.

⁸ Woodhouse, 416-417. In the last statement, Woodhouse quotes J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: a full interpretation based on stylistic and structural analyses, Volume 1: King David (II Sam. 9-20 & 1 Kings 1-2)* (The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, Assen, 1981), 209.

Ahithophel's counsel was heinous, reprehensible, diabolical, and inexcusable, as was Absalom's acceptance of Ahithophel's advice. Yet behind this evil advice and act was the sovereign hand of God, achieving his purpose, fulfilling his word to David through Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:

¹¹ Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'"

- The Lord God
(2 Sam. 12:11-12)

Ahithophel and Absalom were both fully responsible for their heinous acts, but God was sovereign over their sin and used it to fulfill his word to David. God means what he says. He always makes good on his word, and for that reason the Lord is totally trustworthy. The same God that fulfilled his word of judgment against David is the same God that would fulfill his word of promise to David, "I will raise up your offspring after you ... and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13). This promise was initially fulfilled in David's son Solomon, but it was ultimately fulfilled in David's greater descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose adoptive father Joseph "belonged to the house and lineage of David" (Luke 2:4).

Last week we noted that Ahithophel's betrayal may have also prompted David's words in Psalm 41:9: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." The traitor's conduct is compared to a vicious horse that kicks its own master. Jesus quotes this very Scripture in response to Judas' betrayal, saying that the Scripture will be fulfilled. That is to say, David's betrayal by Ahithophel foreshadowed Judas' betrayal of Jesus.

Yet remember the transformative truth of today's text:

***God uses even our enemies
to fulfill his good purposes for us.***

Judas' betrayal of Jesus led to his crucifixion which was followed by the resurrection, which led to Jesus' exaltation by God the Father and the salvation of everyone who would repent of their sin and trust in Christ to grant them forgiveness and eternal life.

You see, not only do we encounter these three types of enemies, but at one time or another we have been these types of enemies to God and others.

- Like Ziba, we have ingratiated ourselves to others only to derive some benefit from them. We have even attempted to manipulate God in this way, thinking, "Well, if I do this for God, then he'll do this for me."
- Like Shimei, our hearts can be like a clogged toilet, stopped up with hate and bitterness, causing an explosion of sewage to come out of our mouths as we curse, criticize, slander and insult other people. In his New Testament letter,

James declares, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be" (James 3:9-10).

- Like Ahithophel, we can be fickle in our relationship with God and others, marked by self-interest rather than steadfast love. We can even be like Judas, who had everyone fooled for years. Outwardly he was committed to Jesus, but inwardly he craved money, power, and prestige. So, when Jesus didn't deliver the goods, Judas "delivered him up" (Matt. 27:3).

How is the Spirit of God speaking to your heart today? Is he convicting you? Is he comforting you? My guess is that it's a probably measure of both. Because we are all sinners, and we have all been sinned against. That's why we need the Lord. When it comes to dealing with our own sin or withstanding the attacks of others, *our soul finds rest in God alone*. He graciously prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies.