

“A Portrait of a Narcissist”
2 Samuel 16:14-23; 17:23
(Preached at Trinity, October 27, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We've been following the steps of Absalom, David's favored son. He was raised with all the benefits of being the son of the king, the royal prince. He also enjoyed the blessing of being unusually handsome. He stood apart from all others in his generation.
2 Samuel 14:25-26 NAU - "Now in all Israel was no one as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no defect in him. ²⁶ When he cut the hair of his head (and it was at the end of every year that he cut *it*, for it was heavy on him so he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head at 200 shekels by the king's weight."
2. But all of these advantages only caused Absalom to acquire a worldview where he was at the center. Everything was about his desires and his pursuits, his ambitions and his advancement. He didn't care who he destroyed in the pursuit of his goals.
This is the classic picture of a narcissist.
Merriam-Webster: "an extremely self-centered person who has an exaggerated sense of self-importance"
3. There is a degree of narcissism in all of us. It is the pride that characterizes our fallen condition. Paul wrote to Timothy:
2 Timothy 3:1-2 NAU - "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self . . ."
4. This narcissism has plagued every generation, but our own seems to be completely swallowed up. We are infatuated with ourselves.
 - a. Stephen Nichols refers to this generation as the "Belly Button Generation." It calls to mind the day an infant discovers his own belly button and it becomes the center of all things. We are consumed with ourselves.
 - b. The Oxford Dictionary has officially coined the word "selfie" describing the phenomena of people taking photos of themselves, usually then posting them on social media for others to see. It reflects the self-centeredness and self-involvement of our culture.
5. This is the pride that we must carefully guard ourselves against, knowing it is vile in the sight of God.
1 Peter 5:5 NAS - "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
6. It was this narcissism that brought about the terrible displays of wickedness in Absalom. But it is not Absalom's narcissism that will be my focus tonight. Tonight, I want to zero in on another character whose own narcissism destroyed him.

7. As we've seen with **Verse 15** the scene changes from the flight of David to the situation back at Jerusalem. Absalom arrives as the apparent victor with Ahithophel at his side.
2 Samuel 16:15 NAU - "Then Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, entered Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him."
8. It would not be beyond reason to assume that Absalom rode in on his chariot with his men running before him.
2 Samuel 15:1 NAU - "Now it came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men as runners before him."
9. Ahithophel had been the David's trusted advisor. But with the coup of Absalom he switched his allegiance. Like Absalom, Ahithophel was driven by his own selfish ambition. In the Hebrew his name means, "brother of folly." And he would live up to his name. He would do or say whatever achieved his goals. And his ultimate goal was maintaining his designation as the chief counsellor of the land, a position that he held without dispute.
2 Samuel 16:23 NAU - "The advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one inquired of the word of God; so was all the advice of Ahithophel regarded by both David and Absalom."
- I. Ahithophel's loyalty depended on whether it was to his advantage – the loyalty of a narcissist.
- A. David considered him a loyal and trusted advisor
1. There are several sorrowful Psalms that are considered Ahithophel Psalms, Psalms where David laments the betrayal of a trusted friend. They draw our attention to the betrayal of Judas Iscariot.
Psalms 41:9 NAU - "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me."
Psalms 55:12-13 NAU - "For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, Then I could bear *it*; Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, Then I could hide myself from him. ¹³ But it is you, a man my equal, My companion and my familiar friend;"
 2. Like Judas Iscariot, Ahithophel was motivated by the lust for personal gain. He saw Absalom as the best option for the moment and turned his back on David.
 Both Judas and Ahithophel sold out their king for the passing treasure of this world.
- B. A narcissist cannot be a trusted friend
1. Ahithophel's loyalty turned out to be false. Like too many, he was willing to switch allegiances if he thought it to his advantage.
 2. His loyalty was only to himself. He was loyal to David when it was good for him, but was just as pleased to switch his loyalty to Absalom.
 3. A true friend will be loyal to his own hurt
Proverbs 17:17 NAU - "A friend loves at all times . . ."
Proverbs 18:24 NAU - "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

- II. Ahithophel's counsel was the pragmatic counsel of a narcissist - a mixture of good judgment and selfish ambition
- A. His counsel was consistently good
1. David had come to trust him without question
 2. There was no one to compare with him in his day, unless it was Hushai.
2 Samuel 16:23-17:1 NAU - "The advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one inquired of the word of God; so was all the advice of Ahithophel *regarded* by both David and Absalom."
 3. Ahithophel's counsel was good
 - a. Go attack David quickly. Catch him off guard while he's weary and tired. Kill David and the rest of his followers would retreat to Absalom.
 - b. It was good counsel but it was not free from selfish motives. His plan at the opening verses of **Chapter 17** rings of selfish, prideful ambition. This is the mark of narcissism.
2 Samuel 17:1-3 NAU - "Furthermore, Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Please let me choose 12,000 men that I may arise and pursue David tonight. ² "I will come upon him while he is weary and exhausted and terrify him, so that all the people who are with him will flee. Then I will strike down the king alone, ³ and I will bring back all the people to you. The return of everyone depends on the man you seek; *then* all the people will be at peace."
 4. Just as Ahithophel anticipated, his plan was well received by all.
2 Samuel 17:4 NAU - "So the plan pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel."
- B. The counsel of a narcissist will often be caught up in his own pride
1. Ahithophel had been trusted advisor to David. Now his counsel is to destroy David, and to conduct the campaign personally
 2. The narcissist will use his own wisdom as the rule to determine the rightness of the action. He does that which is right in his own eyes.
 3. What he didn't plan on was Absalom seeking a second opinion. Hushai knew he was dealing with two narcissists and pitted them against each other.
 - a. First, Hushai outlines some of the weaknesses with Ahithophel's plan.
 - b. He then appeals to Absalom's pride. Knowing Absalom's own narcissistic heart Hushai knew Absalom would seize upon a plan to personally lead the army to victory. What could be more enticing to narcissistic Absalom than for Hushai to suggest that Absalom lead the army personally.
2 Samuel 17:11 NAU - "But I counsel that all Israel be surely gathered to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea in abundance, and that you personally go into battle."

4. The truth is, Ahithophel's plan was the better plan. It would have caught David by surprise and in his weakened state he would have been vulnerable. By suggesting the need for a larger army to go against David he was actually buying time to warn David.
5. Hushai knew that Absalom going into battle put him at risk and made possible David's victory.
He also knew Absalom could not resist the opportunity to personally lead the army.

III. Ahithophel's death was the act of a narcissist

2 Samuel 17:23 NAU - "Now when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled *his* donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself; thus he died and was buried in the grave of his father."

- A. Suicide is a sensitive subject, particularly for those who have loved ones who have committed suicide.
 1. There are few families who are untouched by this tragedy
 - a. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.
 - b. In 2017 over 47,000 Americans died by suicide and 1,400,000 suicide attempts.
 - c. Obviously, talking about suicide for many brings back raw and painful memories.
 2. There are a widespread range of causes of suicide and we have to be careful about making generalizations.
 - a. It is difficult to put yourself in the place of one who has become so depressed and distraught that they have lost all hope for the future.
 - b. How do we explain the darkness into which William Cowper would descend at times? He was blessed to have the pastoral counsel of John Newton.
- B. But at least some suicides are the work of narcissism
 1. All attention is placed upon self without regard for the loved ones left behind. With some, it is the greatest act of selfishness. While they leave this world, they leave behind grieving loved ones who will be forever searching for answers.
 2. Ahithophel falls within the group who commit suicide as a selfish act of self-will.
His wasn't a situation of hopeless darkness. It wasn't an act of despair. It was a premeditated act of narcissism where everything revolved around Ahithophel. He couldn't stand the thought of being rejected.
 3. Notice his motivation was a loss of self-esteem – "when he saw that his counsel was not followed."
His pride had been shattered.
Proverbs 16:18 KJV - "Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."
 4. Notice his premeditation – "he saddled his donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order"

- C. Ahithophel's suicide was also a faithless act
1. God is nowhere in this. This is the end of the one whose entire life is built around the praise of men rather than upon seeking the glory of God. Such a life will always end empty and disappointed.
What does the narcissist wrapped up in himself do when he finds himself weak and helpless? If your sense of worth is wrapped up in your own accomplishments what will you do when it all comes crashing down? Such a life will end hopeless.
 2. This was the case of Saul. Saul lived a self-serving life and his end was an act of self-serving determination. He took his own life rather than trusting it into the hands of God.
1 Samuel 31:4 NAU - "Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me." But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it."
 3. This is the problem with assisted suicide – with premeditation the individual determines to commit self-murder rather than trust their life into the hands of God.
This was the temptation expressed by Job's wife.
Job 2:9-10 NAU - "Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips."
 4. Judas Iscariot's suicide was a faithless act of self-will. There is no doubt he was in anguish and his feelings of guilt were overwhelming, but his betrayal was no different than Peter's. Peter repented and was restored. Judas went out and hung himself.
Matthew 27:3-5 NAU - "Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See *to that yourself!*" ⁵ And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself."
 5. Ahithophel's suicide was a faithless act of self-will.

Conclusion:

1. Once again, we see God's overthrow of the foolish wisdom of men. His sovereign power will prevail over every human scheme. Hushai's counsel ultimately prevailed over Ahithophel's because of God's mighty hand.
2. God moved upon the hearts of Absalom and his elders to reject the better counsel of Ahithophel and receive the weaker counsel of Hushai. God will give the wicked over to the hardness of their own heart.
3. But isn't this what God does in the Gospel. Doesn't he overthrow the foolishness of man. **1 Corinthians 1:19-20 NAS** - "For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"
1 Corinthians 1:25-29 NAS - " Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, ²⁹ that no man should boast before God."
4. Are you not grateful that God overthrew your foolish and rebellious heart and showed you clearly the glories of the Kingdom of Christ?