
The King's Varied Foes

2 Samuel 16:1-14¹⁶

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[Preached the evening of the Biblical Counseling Graduation]

Biblical Counseling is a discipleship ministry of the church to help people who are sinning, suffering and struggling with overwhelming issues of life...

As we minister to people we find two challenging problems:

We have a Bible that is full of narratives, stories about people and problems. Yet they live in a different time, and place and culture. How do we use those stories and narratives without simply turning the texts into moral parables?

We have people who often are struggling in the midst of having been sinned against. Maybe they were molested or abused in their past. Maybe they are being mistreated or abused by a spouse, a boss, someone in their family or ministry circle.

We have people who are suffering under the chastening of God and the severe consequences of sinful choices in the past.

How do we use our Bibles and its stories to both comfort the suffering and confront the sinning?

Our text tonight is in the regular flow our preaching of 2 Samuel here at the Chapel. Tonight's text is a story that will:

...Minister to those who are struggling and suffering in this way.

...equip people helpers and counselors with a portion of the Word of God suited to the need.

A little background for our guests this evening. Our author continues the story of how the chastening of David and the rebellion of Absalom unfolded. Absalom, the renegade and rebellious son of David has led a coup against the king. He has wickedly won the hearts of many of the people to him. In Hebron, he has declared himself king. He is marching on Jerusalem with his army. David has gathered up his household, his servants and soldiers and is fleeing the city. These events are interpreted by David and the author is being in the providence and chastening of the Lord.

We continue to meet people on the road. In the last chapter we meet faithful friends and followers. Now we meet two former servants of Saul. Their approaches to David and David's

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responses to them are placed in glaring contrast. And we learn, as one commentator wryly put it, "A man's flattery is more dangerous than a man's frown." [Matthew Henry]

A Deceitful Flattery (v. 1-4)

We have the first man who comes before us

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."

The Load of Gifts (v. 1-2)

David is met by a Ziba. He had served Saul in the past. Now he is the steward who is tasked to manage the estates from Saul and Jonathan that David had given to Mephibosheth. Ziba has two donkeys laden with supplies for those who traveling with David. David's question is a natural one: are these gifts for me or also for others. Ziba seeks to gain David's favor with extravagant gifts from his employer's fields.

The Curious Inquiry (v. 3a)

Ziba's presence and gifts remind David he has not seen Mephibosheth among his family or followers. Since Ziba's gifts are from Mephibosheth's estates, then where is he? Why has he not joined the flight to continue to be at David's household table?

The Questionable Tale (v. 3b)

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.'" "

Does this fit at all with what we know of Mephibosheth? Don't you suspect something is not right? Has Mephibosheth really stayed in the palace hoping the Absalom will restore the kingdom to a grandson of Saul? It doesn't feel right but it is the story Ziba told. His master is going over to the enemy.

The Rash Response (v. 5)

David strips Mephibosheth of his lands and wealth. He gives it to Ziba. Is this right? Was God pleased by David's actions? Anyone knowing the Law would recognize that this was not in accord with God's Word. There are at least a couple of issues with David's response.

David acts on the word of Ziba alone. He does not know if this is true. He passes judgment without talking to Mephibosheth. Yes, if it is true, the offense against

David's kindness and generosity is huge. But David's response is rash, unjust and unworthy of him. He of all people should know what it is like to have been falsely accused and wrongfully judged.

David should have withheld judgment until two witnesses. He is acting as judge to strip away an inheritance He has no evidence nor witnesses. He only has an accuser with a vested interest.

Ziba responds with respect and homage. Of course he does. He has just been given the vast remaining estates of Saul's and Jonathan's households over which he has maintained an effective stewardship. Loyalty and honor and respect are easy.

So here the lesson for us in counseling. We must be very careful about the stories a person tells us. Hopefully they are speaking the truth. Hopefully, the story they tell you is not being intentionally altered to serve their agenda. Hopefully they are not seeking to minimize their sin and maximize the other person's sin. But the Bible calls on us to carefully weigh what people say. Proverbs tells us that the first telling sounds good until there is careful cross-examination that uncovers the rest of the story. And no final decision can be made, even in the New Testament, until there are at least two witnesses involved in working through the offenses or sins.

An Unjust Curse (v. 5-14)

Fruit and bread laden donkeys and oh so happy Ziba in tow, David and his household move on. They are met by another former servant of Saul. One commentator says, "David bore Shimei's curses much better than Ziba's flatteries. By the latter he was brought to pass a wrong judgement on another, by the former to pass a right judgement on himself." [M. Henry].

The Hateful Cursing (v. 5-8)

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."

What a spectacle. Shimei comes out of his house to greet the fleeing David with curses. He runs along the ridgeline hurling stones and curses against David. His long seething hatred has filled him with poisonous bitterness that overflows into words. He is overjoyed at the fall of David. How he hates this man, this king.

But he has it wrong. David is a man of war not a man of blood. The Lord has anointed David king not avenged David for usurping Saul. David had not wiped out Saul's household as was the custom of the day. He had in fact done a great good for Saul's grandson, Jonathan's son. The testimony to that was right in the caravan.

Shimei responds to David in much the same way the wicked respond to Jesus. In His time here on earth, Jesus was humble and lowly. He did not appear to be the king of the universe. He was treated shamefully. The world did it then. The world does it now. The world has all kinds of ways of cursing and throwing stones at Christ. This running engagement between the wicked in the world and Jesus simply continues today. We have evidences of it all over our neighborhood and all over the nations. This is why we need the gospel. We need the gospel to transform our hearts towards them. They need the gospel to transform their hearts towards God.

The Humbled Response (v. 9-14)

And then you have to love Abishai. He offers to leap to his king's defense...

⁹ Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head." 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 to-day." 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.

Abishai responds as most loyal followers would in this situation. He is angered by the injustice of it. His question is not asking for information. It is an exclamation. Why should this dead dog be allowed to continue to insult and injure the anointed king? Aren't we suffering enough fleeing from Absalom? Do we have to listen to this too? Let's end this now.

Abishai responds as many of you do in a situation like this. He is like Peter brandishing his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to defend Jesus. He is like most people we talk to who want to bring an end to their suffering by bringing an end to the relationship in which the suffering is taking place. Oh, most would not say "Off with their heads..." But many respond with by building alliances to attack their Shimei. They seek divorces. They run to another job. Their response to being sinned against sounds and looks oh so Abishai-like. What is going on their hearts most often will come out in words, and sometimes in deeds.

David restrains the righteous anger of Abishai. Abishai is the brother of Joab, David's military commander. Abishai had been willing to risk his life with David when they were pursued by Saul. He went with David when they caught Saul sleeping in his camp (1 Samuel 26:6). He wanted to kill Saul then, but David said no. Later, Abishai will once again be poised to execute an Israelite who opposed David (2 Samuel 19:22). He and his brother, Joab, tended to see the sword as the answer to everything. David recognizes that little will be served by stopping Shimei's mouth by cutting off his head.

Restraint in the midst of disappointment, adversity, defeat and opposition is a great virtue.

David seems to be sympathetic to Shimei's circumstances. Saul's former supporters and servants have watched a whole dynasty fall. They have seen the king and his son brutally slaughtered on a field of battle. What appears to them to be a rebellion led by the upstart shepherd-soldier in whom Saul trusted has succeeded and put him on the throne. Now, this upstart king David is getting his just rewards. It is no wonder that Shimei is angry and feels justified in cursing David.

Behind the cursing of Shimei though, David sees the providence and chastening of God. Opposing God's means of humbling and correction will certainly mean opposing God. Has God told Shimei to do this? David thinks so. And that is reason enough.

But then David says something to his soldiers and servants that is looking down through the long centuries to the greater David, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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."

David has hope that God will bless him if he endures not only the rebellion of his, but also the cursing and hatred of Shimei. The Apostle Peter writes: **1 Peter 2:18–23**

¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Jesus was sinned against by His own people who sought to put Him to death. He was cursed, spat upon and reviled. But he responded in way that was pleasing to God. He knew that God was in the control. He knew that eventually justice would be served and He would be vindicated.

This should be the poise of God's people. Often we are sinned against in the very worst moments. We may be down, discouraged, defeated. We may have opposition and maybe the enemy has the upper hand. But we do not strike back. We do not get even. We do not close mouths with cut off heads. We don't even speak harsh words to make our case. We see David and how he points us to Jesus. We see Jesus and we run to Him. We see Jesus and seek to live like Him. Is this always satisfying?? No. Does this always feel good? Rarely. But when we are committed to trusting the holy righteous judge, we will have words like this, "Even in this, maybe the Lord will bless." Will living like this lead to always overcoming? No,

not in the short term. Jesus' living like this led to the cross. So once again, the path of discipleship even when being sinned against is one of humility, hardness and death to self.

¹⁴ And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself.

It had been a long day. There had been much trouble and trial. And so they arrive weary at the river. David sets the example for the others. Stop. Rest. Refresh. The journey will still be long and hard.

Reflect and Respond

How do we respond when others sin against us?

How do we help those who are suffering in chastening, in the consequences of past choices?

How do we help those who are struggling with being sinned against?

Let us never forget that those who inflict such harm will be dealt with. We are committing our souls to the one who judged justly. Jesus always judges with right justice. He sees what is true.

There is the justice of the cross...

If the person who is troubling you is or becomes a Christian, all those sins against you have been paid for at the cross. That is grounds for forgiveness. That is the grounds to be reconciled and restored. You do not and cannot and must not demand your own justice. Will Jesus' satisfying the wrath and justice of the Father be satisfying to you?

There will be the justice of the crown...

'The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
Then he rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
"I have installed *my King* on Zion, my holy hill"

And finally, once again the Psalm written during these long days. Psalm 3

¹ O LORD, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;
² many are saying of my soul,
there is no salvation for him in God. *Selah*

³ But you, O LORD, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.

⁴ I cried aloud to the LORD,
and he answered me from his holy hill. *Selah*

⁵ I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.

⁶ I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.

⁷ Arise, O LORD!
Save me, O my God!
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD;
your *blessing* be on your people! *Selah*

Notes