

Why Kick A Man Who Is Already Down?

2 Samuel 16:5-14

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-10-2013

Introduction

It's been a lot of fun having international students in our home over the years. And it's especially fun to see them grow quickly in their use of English. But one of the hang-ups that they almost always seem to have is over the meaning of idioms. I logged onto one of the student forums, and a question came from a student (whom I didn't know) about this British idiom: "It's not cricket to kick a man when he's down." Here was one of the helpful explanations from a fellow student: he said that it means, "Do not frustrate, distress, or humiliate a man when he is down." And the other Chinese student wasn't quite sure he understood the explanation any better than the idiom.

Idioms are sometimes difficult to explain, but this one is actually fairly straightforward. Cricket was an English game played by the Lords and Royalty in earlier times. It was considered a gentleman's game, and they insisted on the importance of playing fair, and never resorting to abusive behavior. They would even applaud their opponents and congratulate them for taking a wicket or scoring a shot. It was normal that if an umpire didn't see something wrong, that the player would honestly reveal the facts to the umpire. For gentlemen, it's not cricket to cheat. But with the passage of time, "It's not cricket" moved from meaning "it's not sportsmanlike" to simply meaning that it's not fair or proper. And of course, kicking a man when he was already down comes from a different sports analogy. When a boxer is down, you don't start kicking him in the head or groin or kidneys. It's not fair; or to mix metaphors, it's not cricket.

And this expression has been used to describe poor behavior in every area of life. Earlier this year, Rick Warren's son, Matthew, committed suicide. And you can imagine the devastation to the whole family. Rick had been given a knockout punch, so to speak. He was on the ground. But despite that fact, people all of a sudden came out of the woodwork and started piling on. Their family was bombarded with hate mail that said that Rick deserved it, or his family deserved worse, or they hoped his son went straight to hell. Now, I'm no Rick Warren fan, but it disgusted me when it wasn't just the homosexuals doing this - it was even Christians who were

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giving Rick Warren kicks to the groin (so to speak) after the loss of their son. It's not cricket. I get upset when I see stuff like that, just like I get upset when I see football players trying to break the wrist or twist the neck of an opponent player who is at the bottom of a dog pile. It's not cricket.

I. The unreasonable hatred of Shimei (vv. 5-9)

A. *There is no indication that Shimei was willing to lawfully criticize David when David was in power, but he is quite willing to kick David when he is down (v. 5a)*

Well, it's not cricket for Shimei to be doing what he is doing. He is kicking David in the emotional kidneys when he is down. And what's weird about it is that Shimei was willing to kick David when he was down, but was not willing to spar with David when he was in power. That's what the prophet Nathan did. He criticized David in a gentlemanly way. Even though David didn't like it, Nathan *was* playing proper cricket. Based on the wording, most people assume that Shimei was introduced to David for the first time here, and he is shown to be a coward in chapter 19. The only time he has boldness to oppose David is when David is on the proverbial mat, and even then Shimei is not playing fair. Verse 5 says,

2Sam. 16:5 Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name *was* Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there...

This is the first we have heard of this man. And so the question comes, "Why is it that people who don't have the guts to oppose injustice when David is in power now come out of the woodwork to give him a rough time when he is much more helpless? And I will have to admit, it's not like Shimei doesn't have some courage here. There is a sense in which he does. His anger gives him some courage. I don't think he was as close to David as the picture in your outline shows him to be. Verse 13 indicates that he was way up on a hill throwing the rocks – probably just far enough that he would be able to run if he needed to. And you have to piece together two passages in interpreting this event. When David comes back to the throne in chapter 19, Shimei suddenly asks for forgiveness and is suddenly peaches and cream and wanting to support David.

And the only explanation that has made sense to me to reconcile the passivity of Shimei prior to this and in chapter 19 with the volcanic eruption in this chapter is pent up bitterness and frustration. It's the same phenomenon that happened in the LA riots. People said that they did things

then (including dangerous things) that they would not have done under normal circumstances. But the loss of order that was sparked by the initial violence in LA unleashed a torrent of bitterness and frustration that had been bubbling under the surface. It's irrational in many ways, but it doesn't take much to bring a law-abiding citizen to irrational rage if they have never dealt with the underlying bitterness in the first place.

B. Pent up bitterness breaks out in an irrational outburst and in emotional cursing (v. 5)

And you can see the irrational outburst and the stream of emotion in the last phrase of verse 5: "He came out, cursing continuously as he came..." This is not just a brief outburst; it is continuous. How long was he doing this? Some commentators say that verses 13-14 imply that he was doing this all the way to the Jordan River, which would be almost twenty-one miles of winding road descending 3700 feet. But since verse 13 mentions the hillside that Shimei kept to, I assume that he only did this from Bahurim to the Jericho plain (which was about a nine to ten mile stretch). But even that would still be a long time to display such rage. Why would an otherwise peace-loving guy go so ballistic? And the answer is, unrestrained anger. And his anger keeps building because angry words reinforce angry emotions and thoughts. Anger that is not restrained can cause people to be quite irrational, and to do things that they later regret.

C. He engages in the equivalent of burning an effigy and unlawful physical abuse (v. 6)

When David is surrounded by at least one thousand people, it might seem pretty stupid for Shimei to be cursing and throwing stones. In effect it was a symbolic stoning (sort of like burning an effigy in the Middle East) and it involved some physical abuse. Probably some of those stones connected with one or more of these people. Verse 6 says,

2Sam. 16:6 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.

I think I would be a little bit nervous throwing stones at David if I was as close as the painting makes it out to be. I think the painting is dead wrong. I've included it, because I wanted to comment on this misconception. We find in chapter 19 that he was a scaredy-cat. This is more akin to what goes on in Middle Eastern countries where a large group of youth will throw stones at Israeli soldiers, knowing full well that they probably won't shoot back. And when the soldiers do try to chase them down, they will run and hide. There was some distance between Shimei and these men because they

would have to go up a steep hill to get him. I couldn't find a good picture of some of the incredibly steep hills that surround the road, but the old one I did find at least gives a little bit of perspective. If you look at the geography of that road from Jerusalem to Jericho (where, by the way, the man in the Good Samaritan story was ambushed by bandits, because they could hide in the crags, cliffs, and rough terrain) you realize that Shimei was a little safer than you might think, and he would have been able to throw stones and run if anyone came after him.

But this is the kind of irrational rage that I have on occasion seen a wife use against her husband, where she will throw things at him and cuss him out, knowing that he probably won't hurt her. Rage can make people do extremely unreasonable things. But certainly David is feeling kicked when he is already down.

D. Telling David that he is not welcome in Benjamite territory (v. 7a)

Verse 7:

2Sam. 16:7 Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: “Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue!”

Most versions give the basic idea of the Hebrew idiom by rendering it, “Get out! Get out!” Shimei was saying, “You are not welcome in our Benjamite territory.” But the implication is, neither would his son Absalom be welcome. There was an underlying hatred of David that had been spreading in the territories where Saul's relatives lived. And it later leads to another revolt.

E. Though there is an element of truth in what he says (v. 7b, 8b), he's got the general accusation wrong (v. 8)

And the reason for the hatred is found in the accusation that he was a bloodthirsty man and a criminal (which is what the word rogue means). He goes on in verse 8 to amplify, saying, “The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul...” Implying what? It implies that he (and probably a bunch of his relatives) thought David had killed Saul and his household. This may explain why it was seven years before the northern tribes were willing to make David king. The rumor mills that Saul had started were continued by Abner and the other Saulides, and despite the fact that the charge was not true, it had poisoned many people to David. And obviously this Saulide still believed those false rumors.

But I have seen people get angry for the wrong reasons and at the wrong people for long periods of time. Pastor John Underhill's mother and his wife Carolyn were at a garage sale one time, and a man heard them talking and came up to them and said, "I see that your name is Underhill. Are you related to a minister?" And Carolyn said, "Yes, my husband is a minister." And she told him where. And the man said, "Well, I could tell you a thing or two." Carolyn's mom said, "Go ahead. I've heard it all." And the man explained how when he had gotten married, he had arranged for the senior minister from their church (Fourth Memorial Church) to conduct the wedding. Well, rather than coming as had been agreed upon, the minister sent a replacement and didn't tell him. And this man never forgot the incident and had been bitter against pastor Underhill for all these years. Pastor Underhill's mom thought this was rather strange and asked the man how many years ago this had taken place, and the man said, "Thirty." To which they both responded that they had only moved to the city twenty-five years ago, and so it couldn't have been John Underhill; it must have been the previous pastor. So everything got straightened out, but Mr. Russell had been bitter at the wrong man for thirty years, just as Shimei had been bitter at the wrong man for 28 years. It can happen. He had wrongly assumed all this time that David had killed all his relatives. No wonder he was bitter. And how many times do we get angry based on misinformation, assuming the report to be true, and not taking the time to double check the facts.

So the whole verse says,

2Sam. 16:8 The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you *are caught* in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!"

The phrase, "you are caught in your own evil" implies that David had taken the kingdom illegitimately just like Absalom now has done. And so, these false accusations were hurtful in the extreme. They are the exact opposite of what David had done. *Saul* was the murderer. *He* was the illegitimate one. *David* was the victim. Shimei should have been mad at *Saul* for the huge loss of life. You see, even though Saul had repeatedly tried to kill David, David had spared Saul's life even when he had the chance to kill Saul easily. David loved Saul and he loved Jonathan. To be accusing David of murdering Saul's family is an incredibly low blow – so low that it wasn't cricket.

Of course, David realizes that though he wasn't guilty of killing *Saul's* family, *he was indeed a murderer and a rogue*. He had slept with

Bathsheba (a capital crime) and he arranged the death of Uriah (another capital crime). Though he had gotten off on a technicality (and it was a technicality that did not allow him to be tried in court), in God's eyes he was worthy of death. So even though Shimei is applying his criticism in the wrong way and with wrong information and with a wrong application, there is an element of truth in what he says. But as far as any court is concerned, Shimei's public accusations would be totally false and subject to the penalty due to a false witness (if this had indeed been treated as a court).

And in this Shimei stands as a warning to us. We must not simply forward the latest funny Facebook harangue against public officials without investigating the legitimacy of the accusation. Some people think like Shimei, that even if every accusation against Obama is not right, that he is a bad guy anyway, and it doesn't matter. Oh yes it does matter. It matters to your own integrity. Toby has rightly pointed out that some Facebook forwards are simply slander – like the one that accused Bush of calling the Constitution just a blankity-blank piece of paper. There are a lot of conservatives and liberals who have forwarded that accusation even though it has been proven to be false. Now, I'm not Bush fan, but that kind of stuff is just not cricket. Forwarding the picture that shows Obama holding his hand over the wrong side of his body is also wrong. If you look at his ring finger, you will see that someone just inverted the picture using a graphics program.

And whether the person you are slandering is a good guy or a bad guy doesn't matter, it is still slander. If Shimei had accused David of adultery and murder of Uriah, and that therefore he deserved to be off the throne, that would not be slander. But Shimei could care less about Uriah. His rage was that Saul's family was not on the throne, and he repeats false accusations about David murdering Saul's family. And it was because this was indeed slander and false accusation that David later tells Solomon that he will know how to deal with Shimei. He's a dangerous man. But at this point David didn't feel like he could deal with it without being a hypocrite.

F. He says things that he later regrets, not having counted the cost (cf. 19:15-23)

In chapter 19 we do find that even Shimei recognizes that what he had said was wrong and was sinful. Let me read that for you. This is 2 Samuel 19, beginning at verse 18.

2Sam. 19:18 Then a ferryboat went across to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. ¶ Now Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king

when he had crossed the Jordan.

2Sam. 19:19 Then he said to the king, “Do not let my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember what wrong your servant did on the day that my lord the king left Jerusalem, that the king should take *it* to heart.

2Sam. 19:20 For I, your servant, know that I have sinned. Therefore here I am, the first to come today of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king.”

2Sam. 19:21 ¶ But Abishai the son of Zeruah answered and said, “Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD’S anointed?”

2Sam. 19:22 ¶ And David said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruah, that you should be adversaries to me today? Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I *am* king over Israel?”

2Sam. 19:23 Therefore the king said to Shimei, “You shall not die.” And the king swore to him.

Just as God had been gracious to David in chapter 12, David was being gracious to Shimei in chapter 19. He recognized that people sometimes say stupid things in the heat of anger. It doesn’t in any way justify the anger or the things said, but David takes it all in stride.

II. The unreasonable response of Abishai (v. 9)

A. *There is an element of truth in what Abishai is saying: Shimei should not have engaged in this misinformed cursing of the king. It was a sin (Ex. 22:28; cf. Rom. 13:1-2; 2 Pet. 2:9-12; Jude 8-10) and if this was an attempt to get people to judge him, it would have been a crime (Deut. 19:19).*

But in both chapter 19 and here in chapter 16, *Abishai* says emotionally charged things that he should not have said. He responds in kind. Back in chapter 16, look at verse 9:

2Sam. 16:9 Then Abishai the son of Zeruah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!”

He recognized that cursing the king was a sin. And too many evangelicals do not recognize this today, so let’s spend a little bit of time thinking about it. Though the Bible allows prophetic rebuke against tyranny, and we see such prophetic rebukes all the way through the Old and New Testaments, they were true descriptions of the evils of bestial governments, not simply angry tirades against authority. Shimei is bringing false accusations. He hasn’t thought them through. Let me read you some of the Scriptures that I have put into your outlines, because when we speak against the evils of our culture, it is critical that we do so lawfully or we will lose

credibility. We are really not to judge anyone. Jesus said, “judge not that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged.” We are only to bring the judgment of God’s Word, not our own judgment. That’s the principle. Exodus 22:28 says,

Ex. 22:28 “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

I want you to note first of all that it is not an absolute prohibition of cursing a ruler. If it was, the Old Testament prophets would be in trouble, and the apostle John would be in trouble when he wrote the book of Revelation – a book which calls down God’s curses on bestial kingdoms. John the Baptist would be in trouble. In fact, we would be in trouble when we sing the imprecatory Psalms. God *commands* us to call down *His* curses upon kings who are persecuting Him and His people. In other words, just as Matthew forbids us to bring our own judgment (but does not forbid us to bring the Bible’s judgment) this passage forbids us from bringing our *own* curse (but does not forbid us from bringing God’s curse). If I were to confront a person who had been caught in adultery, and he were to say to me, “It’s none of your business. Jesus said, Judge not that you be not judged,” my response would be, “Oh, I’m not judging you brother. I’m a sinner too. I’m just the messenger of God’s judgment given in God’s Word.” Do you see the difference? David wrote curses in the Psalms against both Saul and Absalom. But those Psalms were asking *God* to judge them in *His* courtroom; they were not independent curses. So let me read that verse again: Exodus 22:28 says,

Ex. 22:28 “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

The parallelism indicates that we are not to revile God when we curse a ruler. When he steps out from God’s authority, he loses chain of command authority on that issue, and we can ask God to curse. But we are not to throw off legitimate God-given authority simply because there are things that we disagree with. If a ruler is appointed by God, any lawful orders that he gives must still be honored and respected. And if, because there is tyranny, we disrespect all the orders of a tyrant and throw off the legitimacy of any civil authority, then we are falling under the condemnation of Exodus 22:28.

Ecclesiastes 10:20 is similar:

Eccel. 10:20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought...

Even our inward attitudes need to be respectful to all lawful authority. Of course, that begs the question of what is lawful and what is not lawful.

Romans 13 says,

Rom. 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority if not from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Rom. 13:2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

It's a serious thing to resist lawful authority. Since no penalty was assigned to the Exodus law that I read earlier, it was a sin, but not a crime. But it is a sin that still receives *God's* judgment, and I am more fearful of *God's* judgment than I am the king's. When critiquing authorities (as the Bible gives us a long tradition of doing) it is critical that we bring the *Bible's* opinion of their behavior and not simply judge them independently. What I am doing here is I am giving you a theology of individual interposition and it's Biblical limits. 2 Peter 2 says,

2Pet. 2:9 *then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

2Pet. 2:10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,

2Pet. 2:11 whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

2Pet. 2:12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption,

That is an indictment of a lot of what goes on in Facebook. People routinely mock and speak evil of dignitaries without even checking the facts to see if those things are true. There was plenty enough that Shimei could have respectfully and lawfully criticized David over without adding these false criticisms that he had murdered Saul's whole house. And certainly there was nowhere in the Bible where it allows Shimei to throw stones. That's abuse. Jude 8-10 says much the same:

Jude 8 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries.

Jude 9 Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Notice that he lets God bring the judgment and God bring the curse. He doesn't do it independently. When you are praying the imprecatory Psalms, you are saying that same thing that Michael the archangel was saying, "The Lord rebuke you!" You are applying *God's Word* to what is right and what is wrong about the dignitaries, rather than despising authority altogether. So there is a balance there. The next verse warns:

Jude 10 But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.

But that phrase, “these speak evil of whatever they do not know” is an indictment of a lot of forwards on email and a lot of forwards on Facebook. So point A says, “There is an element of truth in what Abishai is saying...” Shimei should not have engaged in this misinformed cursing of the king. It was clearly a sin, and if it had been a false accusation before a court, it would have been a crime. There is disagreement among commentators as to whether Shimei was trying to get these people to judge David and execute him for murder. But let’s for the sake of argument assume the worst: let’s assume that this was an accusation in a court and that Shimei had engaged in a crime and was asking these people to kill him. Abishai’s reaction is still wrong.

B. Returns name calling with name calling (v. 9a)

It’s wrong first of all because it is returning tit for tat; name calling for name-calling; anger for anger; bitterness for bitterness. There is no attempt to respond to the false charges with reasoned answers. Instead, Shimei’s anger arouses an angry response in Abishai, and Shimei’s disrespect for these men arouses equal disrespect from Abishai. Abishai says,

“Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?”

Commentators point out that calling a person a dead dog was one of the worst insults that a person could give. It’s bad enough to call him a dog, but a dead dog? So, if for the sake of argument someone says that Shimei is bringing an accusation in court and that his false accusations and disrespect deserve the death penalty, it could be pointed out that Abishai is using the same disrespect and offering the death penalty without a court having made a decision. He is no better than Shimei in doing this. He too allows his anger to boil over into unreasonable words.

And this too is a good reminder to us to be slow to speak and slow to anger, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. There is a place for righteous anger, *but it is exceedingly rare when we actually have an anger that is unstained by sin. Exceedingly rare.* That’s why one writer said,

A person who is angry on the right grounds, against the right persons, in the right manner, at the right moment, and for the right length of time deserves great praise.¹

¹ *Bits & Pieces*, May 27, 1993, p. 1.

It's tough. Anger is like Nitroglycerin. It's extremely unstable and can be as likely to blow *us* up and to blow our *loved ones* up as it is to blow sin up. God designed anger to blow sin up, but unless anger is tamed by God's grace and instructed thoroughly by Scripture, *it is usually sinful*. So be extremely cautious of allowing anger to make you go off half-cocked in your speech. James tells us to be slow to anger and slow to speech.

C. Abishai offers to kill Shimei without a court trial (v. 9b), thus involving himself in the same hypocrisy as Shimei.

And I've kind of already dealt with point C - that it was a problem when Abishai offered to kill Shimei without a court trial, and thus involved himself in the same hypocrisy as Shimei. I'm giving these reactions as a context within which David's response is remarkable. But before we get to David, let me give one more application of Abishai's reaction. Do we harp on others for things that we do ourselves?

Randall Smith told about an elderly couple he knew that had taken a long vacation trip across the country. They stopped for lunch one day at a roadside restaurant. As they got up to leave, the woman forgot her glasses on the table. They were several miles down the road before she realized that she didn't have them, and to make matters worse, her husband had to travel quite a distance down the road before he was able to find a place where he was able to turn around. Well, he was upset. He fussed and fumed and complained all the way back to the restaurant, berating her for her foolishness and stupidity. How could she be so thoughtless? When they finally got out of the car to retrieve her glasses, the old man said, "Well, as long as you're going back in there, you may as well get my hat, too." Wow! I can imagine that this woman may have wanted to punch his lights out like Abishai wanted to take Shimei out. It's so easy to react like Abishai. As I understand it, she did not. She responded more like David. But with that word picture in your mind, multiply the seriousness of it many times over, and I think you will appreciate both David's reactions to Shimei and his reactions to Abishai. Though we have seen that David was by no means perfect, he does show the grace of God in this response.

III. How David handles this (vv. 10-14)

A. He rejects bitterness and revenge (v. 10a)

First of all, he rejects bitterness and revenge. Verse 10:

2Sam. 16:10 But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, ...

We have seen in the past that Abishai and Joab were both governed by impulsive anger, bitterness, and revenge. And it poisoned them more and more until Joab finally engaged in murder. In past chapters we saw that David tried to *model* forgiveness to them and he tried to encourage *them* to show forgiveness. But when they overlooked a fault it was only because David had pressured them to do so. They had no heart in it. It makes me think of British dramatist, Frederick Lonsdale. He had taken his friend, Seymour Hicks, to the Garrick Club in London for a New Year’s Eve party. And at that party Hicks asked Lonsdale why he was shunning another person that was there that he used to be friends with. And Lonsdale responded that they had had a falling out and were no longer friends, and that he really wasn’t interested in being around him, let alone wishing him a Happy New Year. And Hicks said, “You must. It is very unkind to be unfriendly at such a time. Go over now and wish him a happy New Year.” So Lonsdale crossed the room and spoke to this guy that he now despised and said, “I wish you a happy New Year, but only one.”²

That’s about the best that Joab and Abishai, the sons of Zeruiah were able to do in the past. Even their overlooking of faults was only because David insisted on it. In this chapter Abishai wants to kill Shimei and in chapter 19 he against insists on killing Shimei. David can see that the reasoning of both sides has been poisoned, and the literal Hebrew response is “What to me and to you,” and it is an idiom that I think is better translated, “Do we agree on anything?” or as two other translations word it, “What do we have in common?” “What is there in me that is also in you?” David does not want to be poisoned by such attitudes, and he doesn’t understand how they can persevere in bitterness. It does them no good, and he writes a whole Psalm about this bad attitude – Psalm 37. Psalm 37 is a direct result of this interchange. So David’s first good response was to make sure that he was not poisoned by the bitterness that was flowing very palpably between Shimei and Abishai.

B. He recognizes God’s providence (v. 10c) and God’s discipline behind this (vv. 10c, 11c; cf. 12:10-12)

The second thing that David does right is that he tries to see this in the context of God’s sovereignty and discipline. When he says,

² *Today in the Word*, July 5, 1993

2Sam. 16:10 ... So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, “Curse David.’ Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’ ”

... and when verse 11 says that God has ordered (or commanded) Shimei to do this cursing, he is not implying that Shimei had a prophetic line to God. He’s talking about God’s commandments in providence. Let me explain: How did God create? By His Word; by commanding. When God ordered the light to appear at creation, it appeared. When God orders the lightning to strike, it strikes. When God orders the nations to war, they war. It is God’s command or His Word that structures all of life. And David already knew from God’s prophesy in chapter 12 that the sword was not going to depart from his household – God had decreed this very thing to happen. It was an obvious fulfillment of prophecy. It was a discipline because of his sin with Bathsheba and his killing of Uriah. David’s attitude is basically that even though Shimei got it wrong on whom he had murdered, he was going to listen to this accusation anyway, because it certainly appeared to be part of God’s discipline (both prophesied and providentially ordered). This was Matthew Henry’s understanding of this passage. He said,

As it was Shimei’s sin, it was not from God, but from the devil and his own wicked heart, nor did God’s hand in it excuse or extenuate it, much less justify it, any more than it did the sin of those who put Christ to death, Acts 2:23, 4:28. But, as it was David’s affliction, it was from the Lord, one of the evils which he raised up against him.³

Even though John Wesley was an Arminian, he had a similar understanding. He said,

And this is ground enough for this expression, *the Lord said*, not by the word of his precept, but by the word of his providence, in respect whereof he is said to *command the ravens*, 1 Kings 17:4 and to *send forth his word* to senseless creatures, *Psal.* 147:15, 18. Who shall reproach God’s providence for permitting this? Or, who shall restrain him from executing his just judgment against me?⁴

And I think it is wise for us to examine God’s hand in allowing attacks in our lives. If those attacks have been allowed by God as a part of our discipline, getting too angry at the sin of those people who are hurting us could blind us to what God is doing. Yes they are wrong, but is there any truth to what they are saying? That's what we should be asking.

I had a professor at Seminary who always looked for the grain of truth in any criticism, no matter how far off the mark that criticism may have been. Even if the criticism was 98% wrong, this professor sought to first of all repent of

³ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 464). Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁴ Wesley, J. (1765). *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (Vol. 2, p. 1046). Bristol: William Pine.

the 2% that was right before he sought to straighten out the 98% that was wrong. And I think all of us should strive to do that.

However, if instead of doing that, we become outraged by the 98% that they have gotten wrong about us, our anger will tend to blind us to the 2% where we are wrong and will blind us to possible corrections that God Himself is seeking to bring into our own lives. We would do better to examine our own sins with a magnifying glass just as David did in some of the Psalms that he wrote on this day, than to examine the sins of Shimei with a magnifying glass. When we are quicker to see our own sins than the sins of others, then we will tend to not become bitter.

C. He recognizes that Shimei has even more reason to be upset with him than his son does, and that there is an element of truth in the statement that he deserves worse (v. 11; cf. 11:1-12:15)

The third thing that David did right was to give himself a bird's eye perspective. Look at verse 11:

2Sam. 16:11 And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now *may this* Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him.

In effect he is recognizing that Shimei has far more reason to be upset with him than his son does. Shimei had been related to the king, now he is nothing. He has lost a lot. And furthermore, since he is related to Saul, he's probably only heard one side of the story. David in some ways can sympathize with Shimei's anger, even though he doesn't justify it. But there is more. David recognizes both that there is an element of truth in what Shimei has said and that he really deserves far worse than what Shimei is dishing out.

Any time we can look at the tragedies that we experience and realize that we deserve far worse than what we are experiencing, it helps us to handle them a little bit better. And actually, the book of Philippians indicates that this is one of the products of God's grace in our lives – we will see the evil of our own heart so strongly (like Paul, who thought of himself as the chief of sinners), that it will remove the impulse to want revenge. We will recognize, "I actually deserve far worse. I'm thankful to God that this is all I am getting."

Pastor Kenneth Sauer of Newport News, Virginia said that he could see this kind of change rather vividly in the life of one of his members, a truck driver, when he became saved. People in their small group had been asked to outline what changes God had wrought into their lives when they

became Christians. And this truck driver said, “Well, when I find somebody tailgating my truck, I no longer drive on the shoulder of the road to kick up pebbles and rocks on them.”⁵ I didn’t know that was a tactic that truckers used. Anyway, God had removed from his heart this desire to get even. It’s a wonderful change of grace. And we all need it. That’s why Romans 12 warns us in so many ways to not be overcome by the evil actions of other people, but rather, to overcome evil with good. Joab and Abishai were being overcome.

D. He recognizes that God lifts up the humble (v. 12)

The fourth thing that David did right was to humble himself before God. Verse 12:

2Sam. 16:12 It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day.”

The word for “affliction” is elsewhere translated as either “iniquity,” “guilt,” or “punishment” for guilt. David sees himself as under God’s discipline, and he thinks the only appropriate thing to do when being disciplined is to humble himself. Yeah, if there wasn’t discipline, there might be good reason to be upset with Shimei, but he doesn’t want the fact that Shimei is wrong to cloud his own vision and to keep him from responding humbly to God. He knew that God exalts the humble but abases the proud. And it is his prayer that if he humbles himself before God, that God will lift him up. And God does. So responding to Providence in humility is another tool to help us to avoid getting bitter.

E. He imitated the endurance (v. 13) and perseverance (v. 14) of Job (cf. James 5:11)

The last thing that David does is to commit himself to endurance and perseverance. Verses 13-14:

2Sam. 16:13 And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust.

2Sam. 16:14 Now the king and all the people who *were* with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there.

It takes self-control to not respond sinfully to such infuriating nonsense. It is like Satan is doing everything that he can to get David pridefully and sinfully mad. Satan wants to short-circuit everything good that God is doing in David’s heart. All along the Jericho road, Satan is trying

⁵ In a sermon called, "The Most Excellent Way" by Kenneth Sauer.

to make David do something he will later regret. And David didn't bite. It takes endurance to keep on keeping on when life is not fun. But this too is part of God's calling upon us.

Conclusion

And it is really at a juncture like this that it is imperative that we pray, and cry out to God with our frustrations, and leave them at His feet, and worship Him, and trust Him, and ask Him to help us to respond properly. I don't think it is by accident that 17 or 18 of David's Psalms are dated to this period of Absalom's rebellion (Psalms 3,4,9,10,11,12,26, 27?,36,37,39,41, 55,61,63,70,141,143). Some say that it is as high as 23 Psalms that were written during this period (Psalms 23,28,40,58,64), though I put those five Psalms during the period of his flight from Saul. But even the low figure of 17 Psalms during this short period of days is incredible!

And these Psalms show that the pain of betrayal, loneliness, false accusation, loss, and unknown future drove David deeper and deeper and deeper into the heart of God, and strengthened him enormously. It wouldn't surprise me at all if our Reformed leader friend who has fallen so low in the past weeks, ends up growing more in the coming weeks than he has ever grown. While Joab and Abishai were focusing on how they have been wronged (and thus they missed out), David was focusing on God (and what God's intentions were). When you read those Psalms you find a depth of God's grace that is unusual. David had learned how to benefit from negative providences. And if you want a great book that teaches you how to do this, read Thomas Boston's book, *The Crook in the Lot*, or even better, get Curtis Crenshaw's modern English update of that book, which has been retitled, *How To Profit From Our Afflictions*. It's a tremendous book to show you how to grow like crazy when times are bad. Curtis Crenshaw grew to love that book when the IRS was taking him to court over and over again. And even though he won, it was an incredibly stressful time. What made it especially stressful was that the PCA assumed he and his church were guilty if the IRS said he was. They didn't even investigate. They had a presumption of guilt. But rather than growing bitter over these ungodly things that were happening to him, Curtis chose to grow better by his responses of faith. So it's a great book.

Now it is true that David's faith, peace, love, and other graces were tested to the limits, but they grew stronger and produced masterpieces that have ministered to countless thousands. It's hard to communicate how the disloyalty of man drove David to become more consistently loyal to God,

but when you read those Psalms, they minister to the heart like nothing else. And they would not have ministered so well if David had not been allowed to go through such tough times. One of my favorites is Psalm 27, but let me just read the first eleven verses of Psalm 37 to give you a little bit of a feel for how David's heart was responding without anger and bitterness.

Psa. 37:1 Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.

Psa. 37:2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

Psa. 37:3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

Psa. 37:4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Psa. 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring *it* to pass.

Psa. 37:6 He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

Psa. 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

Psa. 37:8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm.

Psa. 37:9 For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

Psa. 37:10 For yet a little while and the wicked *shall be no more*; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it *shall be no more*.

Psa. 37:11 But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

I especially like verse 8: “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm.” If you are a Shimei who has been given false information about a David, don't take offense without checking out your facts. The first one to tell a story to you sounds pretty convincing until another comes along and challenges certain facts. Shimei took great offense over false information. And don't allow your anger to explode or you will do stupid things like Shimei did. For sure, don't kick a David when he is already down. It isn't cricket. But every Shimei needs that advice: “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm.”

But if you are an Abishai who is having stones cast at you and insults thrown at you, don't respond in kind. Don't stoop to the level of a Shimei. Don't allow someone else's anger to make your anger explode. Follow David's advice: “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret – *it* only *causes* harm.”

And if you are a David who is being pulled in a tug of war between Shimei and Abishai while fleeing from an Absalom, don't despair. Don't lash out. David's advice is still the same: "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm." May the Lord give us grace to be like David was here. Amen.

Why Kick A Man Who Is Already Down?

2 Samuel 16:5-14

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-10-2013

Introduction

- I. The unreasonable hatred of Shimei (vv. 5-9)
 - A. There is no indication that Shimei was willing to lawfully criticize David when David was in power, but he is quite willing to kick David when he is down (v. 5a)
 - B. Pent up bitterness breaks out in an irrational outburst and in emotional cursing (v. 5)
 - C. He engages in the equivalent of burning an effigy and unlawful physical abuse (v. 6)
 - D. Telling David that he is not welcome in Benjamite territory (v. 7a)
 - E. Though there is an element of truth in what he says (v. 7b, 8b), he's got the general accusation wrong (v. 8)
 - F. He says things that he later regrets, not having counted the cost (cf. 19:15-23)

- II. The unreasonable response of Abishai (v. 9)
 - A. There is an element of truth in what Abishai is saying: Shimei should not have engaged in this misinformed cursing of the king. It was a sin (Ex. 22:28; cf. Rom. 13:1-2; 2 Pet. 2:9-12; Jude 8-10) and if this was an attempt to get people to judge him, it would have been a crime (Deut. 19:19).
 - B. Returns name calling with name calling (v. 9a)
 - C. Abishai offers to kill Shimei without a court trial (v. 9b), thus involving himself in the same hypocrisy as Shimei.

- III. How David handles this (vv. 10-14)
 - A. He rejects bitterness and revenge (v. 10a)

 - B. He recognizes God's providence (v. 10c) and God's discipline behind this (vv. 10c, 11c; cf 12:10-12)

 - C. He recognizes that Shimei has even more reason to be upset with him than his son does, and that there is an element of truth in the statement that he deserves worse (v. 11; cf. 11:1-12:15)

 - D. He recognizes that God lifts up the humble (v. 12)

 - E. He imitated the endurance (v. 13) and perseverance (v. 14) of Job (cf. James 5:11)

Conclusion



The old road from Jerusalem to Jericho



Do not fret,
it only
causes harm