

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 2 Samuel 16 as we continue our study through the historical books. We've mentioned to you a lot that historical books are written in narrative form which means there are stories, not necessarily theological statements. So rather than going through the book of Hebrews or Romans or Paul's epistles where every sentence you have to kind of break down and, in the context, look at what's being taught, you can go chapters, sometimes, and get one big lesson. And so the way that you learn from narratives is that you put yourself in the equation; you stand next to the characters, you imagine yourself being with them, making those decisions or not. What would the LORD have taught you? And, as a living example, we discover, then, what God's will is, and as long as we stay in the context, we won't get off trying to make things happen there or say things that the Bible's not teaching. Stay with the story, in other words.

So we've been with David. He is the second king that Israel has had after Saul. He came to power in 1011 B.C. He would rule for forty years; the first seven-and-a-half years just over, really, one tribe while Saul's family continued to fight for Saul's legacy, if you will. For the next thirty-three years, though, David would rule over all of Israel. He would die at 70. He is in his 60's by the time we get to these chapters. David's in a position now - and we've learned a lot, if you haven't been with us - David is a man that is after God's own heart because he's quick to repent. He's a man of tremendous faith. He trusts the LORD implicitly many times. He does the right things often. There're some big problems in David's life. He loves women. And because of that, he has a lot of wives; he has a lot of kids. They're not necessarily cared for very well. Certainly no father figure David was. As a result, that became a problem. And then, because of his fascination for women, David finds himself - later on in life, in his 50's - sinning with Bathsheba. And if you were with us, that sin precipitated all kinds of problems. David tried to hide it for a year. It didn't go very well. It was one of his roughest years ever. You can read things that he wrote in the Psalms during that time. Eventually Nathan the prophet confronts David. He repents of his sin. He finds out God's not gonna kill him, even though the adultery and murder are punishable by death. But the LORD does say to David, in chapter 12:10-12, "Because of this sin, you're going to have consequences. You'll be forgiven, but there'll be consequences. What you did in secret, your family's going to do to you publicly. There's never going to be peace in

your home." There's going to be strife continually as a result of this sinfulness and these decisions that David made.

So, forgiven but yet having to live with the consequences. It's like getting pregnant before you're married, and you slept with your boyfriend or girlfriend, and, "Oh, we shouldn't have done that Lord. We're sorry." Yeah, but there's a baby now. Now you have consequences. God forgives, but now you have responsibility. So, that's certainly one of David's stories.

To lead up to what we're looking at tonight - and there're only a few chapters left because the last four chapters of this book are not in chronological order; they're kind of cherry-picked by the Holy Spirit to teach us specific lessons; and then in 1 Kings we'll go back to David's last days and then be moved on to Solomon - David, after his sin with Bathsheba, obviously is not in a real good position to be correcting his kids on behavior. One of his sons, Amnon, had raped one of his sisters, his half-sister Tamar (another one of David's children). He was ill-equipped to handle it. Tamar happened to belong to the family of Absalom, as well, and Absalom was furious that David, his father, wouldn't do anything about something that horrendous. For two years, there was no action. In the third year, Absalom took it upon himself and schemed and plotted and basically killed his half-brother; got even for his sister's mistreatment, if you will. Which caused him to run to Syria, where he hid amongst his wife's family, and he would stay there for three years. Joab, who was David's nephew, also head of his army, tried to reconcile the two together because David suffered and so did Absalom; it didn't work. He finally got him to agree to let Absalom come back into the country and then wouldn't see him for two years. So that's seven years that have passed. By the time that they meet (at the end of chapter 14), it's cold, it's useless; they pretty much are unwilling to be soft in heart. It was almost too little, too late. As a result, Absalom (chapter 15) decides, "I'll try to become king, then." He rallies people around him, he has a pretty good support staff, he plans a coup to overthrow his dad. And Dad is now in his 60's. David, remember, dies at 70, so these are the last ten years of David's life. When the support seemed sufficient, Absalom went to Hebron - gathered the troops together, even stole away David's best friend and counselor, a fellow named Ahithophel, who had been with David for years. As a result, the coup got strong. David, hearing of it, decides rather than stay to fight (and he's a fighter), he would leave, pack up his family, take his friends, evacuate Jerusalem so that when his son came, nobody has to die. He would rather give up than see people get hurt, believing.....and remember, David is

ten years or more down the road from the Bathsheba incident. David's walking with the LORD in every sense of the word. He's suffering the consequences, in many ways, but his relationship with the LORD has never been better.

So, he wants to leave and let his son come in. And he basically just says, "If the LORD wants me back here, then I'll get back. It'll be God's choice." He's a pliable, submitted, broken-spirited man, now completely in God's care. So he heads up the Mount of Olives. He goes down to the Jordan River, heads for the wilderness. He has the support of a lot of people. He sends Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, and their sons back; says, "Take the ark back. That's where the LORD wanted to be worshipped, and God be willing, I'll get to come back here if it's His will and worship." He sent a good friend of his named Hushai, who had been a counselor for a long time, sent him to gather information; said, "Just stick around. If you find out anything, maybe you can send me a message through the boys, the priests' sons, and maybe you can have an opportunity to counsel opposing..... Ahithophel was just going to try to wipe us out. That's his plan." So, as the troops of Absalom enter the city, David and his family exit. In fact, if you read the last verse of chapter 15, it says, "So Hushai, David's friend, went into the city. And Absalom came into Jerusalem." So there was that parting of the ways.

We learn from David, at least through part of this narrative, that suffering chastisement from a loving Father and living with the consequences of sin can be difficult, but it is good for us in the long run. They're long forgotten and forgiven. There is still fruit that David has to bear. If you want to know what David's heart is like during these chapters, read Psalm 43. He wrote them on the way out of town, and he wrote about his faith in the LORD - asked God to bring him back, wants to worship in Jerusalem, asks in faith, forsakes his post, runs away so that innocent lives can be saved. He believes that and understands that part of this was his problem to begin with, but he asks God to make it right.

So tonight we're going to just go through chapters 16 and 17 as one story. I think we'll be all right for time. And then as David leaves, trusting the LORD, next week we'll get the conclusion of it there in chapter 18 and all, and then we'll just have one more chapter before we end the book with assorted tales that the LORD wants us to remember that we wouldn't know otherwise.

Verse 1, "When David was a little past the top of the mountain, there was Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, who met him with a couple of saddled donkeys, and on

them two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred summer fruits, and a skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, 'What do you mean to do with these?' So Ziba said, '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 are faint in the wilderness to drink.' Then the king said, 'And where is your master's son?' And Ziba said to the king, 'Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, "Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me."' So the king said to Ziba, 'Here, all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours.' And Ziba said, 'I humbly bow before you, that I may find favor in your sight, my lord, O king!' " So on the way out, David runs into this guy, Ziba. If you weren't with us back in chapter 9, Ziba was a fellow that worked for Saul, who had done very well for himself during Saul's reign. He had fifteen sons, he had twenty servants. He had used Jonathan's lame son, this fellow Mephibosheth, for years to make himself wealthy. When David, who had made a promise to Saul's family to take care of them, found out about this fellow Mephibosheth, he was furious. He grabbed Ziba. He realized what he had done, and he said to him, "From now on, you'll take care of this boy, and our accountants will be watching you." And so this fellow, Ziba, was put in a place of caring for a lame boy and his family under the watchful eye of David's administration, and he hated it, while Mephibosheth got to eat every day at David's table.

Well, we haven't seen this guy for about six or seven chapters, and now he comes, but he's an opportunist. He chafes under the new arrangement. He figures, "David is on his way out, for good. Let me get ahead of this thing." And so he brings a lot of food and drinks and all. He comes to David in his distress, pretending to be on his side, while suggesting - or more than suggesting, saying - that Mephibosheth, this boy that David had been so good to, was now accused of disloyalty. "He's gonna stay in town and hope to get back all those things that you, David, have taken from Saul's family." David, on his way out - under tremendous pressure - listens to the slander. He doesn't consider how kind this young man has been over the years. He doesn't take into account that this fellow Ziba, before, has history and lots of motives to do the wrong thing. In his haste and in his anger, he says to this man, "Take everything that Mephibosheth has, and it all comes back to you. You can just have it." Right? "Just take control." And, with a thousand thank-yous, "Adios," Ziba walks off thinkin', "Wow, this worked out just fine."

So here's a good lesson - don't let gossip be credible so fast, and don't let someone's action or behavior accusation from another have you make your mind up

about other people. Because if David would have considered the whole person, at least from what we know of him, he's a pretty good kid. You know? Been pretty faithful. But quick emotional judgments are going to fail you, and certainly that's the case. Remember we read in James 1 about being impartial? Or partiality was snap judgments based on superficial knowledge? Jesus said, "Don't judge according to appearance, judge righteously" (John 7:24). So David, understanding he's under a lot of strain - he's an old guy, he's on his way out, he doesn't know what his future holds, his son has turned on him (just one more thing to have to go with) - but it's a very rash decision made under duress. It will have to be amended later on, but being a proud guy, David doesn't really amend the whole thing; he makes half of it right. He doesn't really admit that this was a mistake on his part. For now Ziba, with, like I said, a thousand thank-yous, gets out of the way for our next little fellow that comes to see David, a fellow in verse 5 named Shimei. And, by the way, when David returns in a few days/weeks, Shimei and Ziba will be hangin' out together. They're both from Saul's family, by the way. Thirty years Saul's been dead, but they both still hate David's family because of the dynasty that he replaced.

Verse 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. He came out, cursing continuously as he came." (Pleasant fellow) "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. Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: 'Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! 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!' " Well, unlike the previous guy who came with compliments, this guy came with his hatred. When he heard flattery, by the way, David made the wrong choice. When he hears cursing and outright criticism, he's about to do the right thing. Bahurim - what we read - is located in the Jordan Valley; very hot and surrounded by lots of cliffs. This guy was from the tribe of Benjamin; he was a distant relative to Saul. He was filled with false accusation and cursing and rocks and threats and obviously didn't care what God had done or decided. He had carried a grudge for years. He saw David, now 60 years old and leaving town, as washed up. He yaps like a terrier and seems unafraid.

Put yourself in David's shoes. These haven't been the best few years. His zenith really happened prior to his sin with Bathsheba. He couldn't have had more blessing. But since then, things have been pretty tough. He's had a son killed, a daughter raped, another son alienated from him; now there's another one who's leading a coup. His best friend has betrayed him. Supposedly Jonathan's boy that he's cared for, for so many years, has turned aside as well. He's headed for a dark and kind of hot desert with an unknown future, and this is his greeting party. So, you can write in the margin of your Bible - Murphy's Law was already invented at this time. I mean, it couldn't have been more difficult. Imagine you're the king, and this guy's bad-mouthin' you and saying you've killed Saul, you've murdered his family. David was so careful not to lay his hand on God's anointed. He stopped his soldiers from killing Saul a couple of times. He wept genuinely when he (Saul) died. None of this was true, by the way. This was all unfounded, unsubstantiated, horrible accusations, but they're being delivered loudly in front of all of his family and his peers.

Well, Abishai, who is Joab's brother and David's nephew, verse 9, suggests that maybe he should have an attitude adjustment. "Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah" (which is David's sister) "said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!' " (Gotta like that guy.) "But the king said, 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, "Curse David." Who then shall say, "Why have you done so?" ' 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. 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.' 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." (Like a terrier) "Now the king and all the people who were with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there." David's attitude towards everything he's going through has changed. Right? "God maybe sent him. I don't know. I deserve it. I certainly don't deserve His blessings. My only hope of deliverance is not in my might but in His mercy. I deserve worse. So maybe the LORD will bless. I'll just let him yell and scream." It's remarkable to me that David, first of all, turns himself away from getting even; more remarkable that he has a guy willing to do it.....just saying 'yes' would have been all he needed to say, and yet he just left it be. What an amazing picture of David, a broken man who will let God fight his battles. And so, later on, Peter, when he wrote about

Jesus in chapter 2:23 of 1 Peter, said that "when He was reviled, He didn't revile in return; when He suffered, he didn't make threats, but He committed Himself to the One who judges righteously." Or, if you want, He didn't get even; He let the Father deal with His enemies. That's hard for us to do, especially if you're a big guy, and you're used to punchin' people in the eye. Or you don't worry about that, you know? It's a "man" thing a lot of times. But it is so good to see David, in his older age, just lettin' the LORD handle it. He knew, by the way, that all that he was accusing him of was false. And he left it with the LORD.

What do you do when you're falsely accused? How do you handle that? I suspect it might not be like this. It might be like Abishai. "You want me to go over and cut off his head?" But that doesn't really work either. Our natural impulse is to set the record straight with an exclamation point. It is wiser to let God balance the books. What did Paul say? Romans 12:19, " 'Vengeance is Mine,' says the Lord." Right? Let God handle it.

So it's a good thing to learn as we walk with David in this narrative, heading out of town. David did something pretty interesting. He looked by his enemy. I think sometimes we get stuck in our faith because we stop at our enemy. All we see is our enemy. David saw his enemy and said, "Eh. There's the LORD. Maybe He'll bless. Maybe He'll bring me back. Maybe He'll take care of this. Maybe He sent this guy. But whatever he is, I'm looking to the LORD." He looks by his enemy, which is pretty amazing. When Peter stood in the garden, he only saw the enemy. That's all he saw. When the disciples were in Samaria, and they weren't being given a hotel room because they were headed for Jerusalem and they volunteered to Jesus (at least James and John did), "Lord, do You want us to call fire down from heaven like Elijah?" (Luke 9:54), they stopped at their enemy. They never looked beyond their enemy. I think the best way for us to go is get your eyes on Jesus, and then your enemy kind of disappears. If you can do that, then you can have some peace. But it's hard. It's a challenge. It's easy to fail to see God at work when facing a challenge where our flesh wants to help out. David did good.

We read here that they got to the Jordan, a place of rest, a place of shade, a place of water. David would wait here, according to the end of chapter 15, for Hushai to send some information through the priests as to what his son, Absalom, was planning to do in town.

Well, meanwhile, while that's going on, the kids are resting, we are taken back to the palace in Jerusalem where the drama has just begun. Verse 15, "Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and" (that counselor of David's) "Ahithophel was with him" (Absalom). "And so it was, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, that Hushai said to Absalom, 'Long live the king! Long live the king!' So Absalom said to Hushai, 'Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?' And Hushai said to Absalom, 'No, but whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with Him I will remain. Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father's presence, so will I be in your presence.' Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, 'Give advice as to what we should do.' And 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 are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong.' So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house," (where everyone would see) "and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle" (or the mouth) "of God. So was all the advice of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom." So David had left none too soon. The troops were already in the city.

Hushai passes the test with a little bit of a ruse. Now, the Bible's real clear. God lays everything out before us. He doesn't lie. He said, "I'll serve whoever the LORD puts in charge." Which is fine. I think he knew who the LORD had put in charge. It's a bit deceptive. God can certainly work without your help. There are times when I think He excuses our lack of faith. I always think about Rahab lying to the party that was hunting down the spies. She'd known the LORD in earnest for just a little while, and God never really calls her out for what was obviously a lie. But He still had his way. So God was going to use this fellow, Hushai, to spare David and the folks that were on the run. That doesn't mean He needs to use our sinfulness to do so. So whenever you see these reports, they happened, God worked despite them. But certainly Hushai, if he's gonna serve as a double agent, he's gonna have to not tell the whole truth. So, "I'm loyal to everyone who's in charge now" is what he said.

And then Absalom turns to his counselor who, according to verse 23, had always had a reputation of speaking for the LORD and had been like that for decades. He was a true prophet of God. God had spoken through him often, through David. He

had spoken to Absalom as well. His advice, now, was horrible, but that doesn't mean that he hadn't been a faithful man in the past. He says to his wicked counselors, not out of character with the times....in fact, if a nation would defeat you, the captor would often take the wives of the conquered men to show that they now reigned, if you will; it usually followed their death in battle, if you will. So, that was his advice. No doubt Ahithophel understood that the coup was fragile, that soon sympathy might outweigh everything that was going on. And so he wanted to have Absalom do some things that wouldn't allow him to go back. I mean, once he crossed this threshold, that was it. It's going to be it with his dad. He's all in now. So I think I mentioned to you last week as well that Ahithophel's son had a daughter named Bathsheba, who married a fellow named Uriah, who was also one of his family. So Ahithophel, once this sin took place, in his heart, needed to get even. That was his mindset, if you will. So, on the very same rooftop where David had fallen as he lingered, David's son now defiles his family. And Ahithophel gives evil counsel where, up to this point, God had always used him to speak the truth.

Verse 1 of chapter 17, "Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, 'Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king. Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace.' And the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel." Ahithophel's counsel is wise. It's wicked, but it's wise. "We need to immediately go after David. He's disoriented, he doesn't have any army together. If I kill him, everyone else runs. He's the leader, he's the glue that holds the thing together." It really sounds a little bit like Caiaphas, you remember, in John (11:50) when he said to the people, "It's expedient that one person would die for the people. We get rid of Jesus, this whole movement stops." And so he thought. And so it's like that vinedresser story and parable that Jesus talked about His death. The wicked people said, "This is the heir, and if we kill him, the inheritance will be ours" (Matthew 21:38, Mark 12:7, Luke 20:14). It's the same kind of philosophy. Right? As I mentioned to you, there's lots of personal vengeance in Ahithophel's counsel. Notice the "I-I-I-I" all the way through here. Yet, from a warring standpoint, the best advice you can have, you got someone on the run, go get him. Don't let him rest, don't let him organize, don't let him prepare. Just wipe him out now, before they get their bearings. And notice, verse 4, everyone seemed to think that was a good idea.

And then something interesting happens, and you can see God's hand upon what looks like a terrible situation. And it shows you that the LORD doesn't need Hushai to lie; he just needs to be available. Because Absalom now says of his enemy that he doesn't trust, verse 5, " 'Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he says too.' " Really dumb. He's got everyone happy, in verse 4. His enemy, a guy we don't trust, is back. And he goes, "Let's have him. What do you think?" Oh, bad moves, pal. But it shows God's hand at work, and like I said, He doesn't need our help. He'll establish His people where He wants them to be. I really see the hand of the LORD here. There's a Scripture that says, "Every man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart" (Proverbs 16:2, 21:2). So, here comes Hushai. And it seems to me, in verse 4, everyone was happy. Ahithophel could have went, "All right. Let's go." That would have been the end of it. Verse 5 is God stepping into the process, which is very interesting to me.

So they called Hushai, verse 6. Absalom says to him, " 'Ahithophel has spoken in this manner. Shall we do as he says? If not, speak up.' So Hushai said to Absalom: 'The advice that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time. For,' said Hushai, 'you know your father and his men, that they are might men, and they are enraged in their minds, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field; and your father is a man of war, and will not camp with the people. Surely by now he is hidden in some pit, or in some other place. And it will be, when some of them are overthrown at the first, that whoever hears it will say, "There is a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom." And even he who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt completely. For all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and those who are with him are valiant men. Therefore I advise that all Israel be fully gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba,' " (from the north to the south) " 'like the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. So we will come upon him in some place where he may be found, and we will fall on him as the dew falls on the ground. And of him and all the men who are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he has withdrawn into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city; and we will pull it into the river, until there is not one small stone found there.' So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel.' For the LORD had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring disaster on Absalom." So, hand of God at work, don't you think? I mean, there's no way this works out unless the LORD has this fellow, of all things, the prophet, "Let's get another advice," and, boy, what great advice it was. So, though Hushai had had to (I won't say) lie but bend the truth a little, hoping to

save David, that didn't help the LORD open the doors. He did that on His own. And what he said was also correct. So now God would use him. From verse 6, we know Absalom told him of Ahithophel's counsel. So he already knew what he was up against. And Hushai's a pretty old statesman; he's been around for twenty-five years. He's good with words, and he's like 180 degrees in the other direction. Took a lot of courage to speak up. He was under suspicion. He was speaking against the counsel of a known prophet who the people admired, and he was dealing with Absalom, who was a ruthless guy. So this was a pretty difficult situation. But here's God's double agent lashing out. So, rationale and good appeal to ego, this old statesman says, "Look, you're gonna find your dad madder than a wet hen. His guys are brutal. If you start losing, you're gonna lose the whole thing. So you better just come in with overwhelming force so that there's no way you can lose. And then the people will recognize you as the great man that you are." And Absalom could envision this, oh, huge win, destruction of the forces, pride going before destruction. How vulnerable he is to his pride. And so he accepts the counsel. In fact, in verse 14 we read, "The LORD had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring disaster on Absalom." So, in other words, he was literally saying, "Ahithophel would have gotten me killed, so I'm glad that the LORD stepped in with this new guy." Well, all right.

Verse 15, "Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, 'Thus and so Ahithophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and so I have advised. Now therefore, send quickly and tell David, saying, "Do not spend this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily cross over, lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up." ' Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz" (which are the two boys of the priests) "stayed at En Rogel, for they dared not be seen coming into the city; so a female servant would come and tell them, and they would go and tell King David." (So, a little sneaky going on there.) "Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom. But both of them went away quickly and came to a man's house in Bahurim," (where David was hiding) "who had a well in his court; and they went down into it. Then the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground grain on it; and the thing was not known. And when Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, 'Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?' So the woman said to them, 'They have gone over the water brook.' And when they had searched and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem. Now it came to pass, after they had departed, that they came up out of the well and went and told King David, and said to David, 'Arise and cross over the water quickly. For thus has Ahithophel advised against you.' So David and

all the people who were with him arose and crossed over the Jordan. By morning light not one of them was left who had not gone over the Jordan." So, harrowing experience, got the word out, a little sneaks goin' on. David gets it, spends the whole night getting his whole group out and away and moving them away from danger. The LORD is still working. Right? The LORD is still working.

Verse 23, "Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb." So one of David's enemies falls by his own hand. The question is what happened here? Well, a couple of things. If Absalom takes over, Ahithophel's gonna get killed because he realizes (even what we just read) that God has moved in to protect David from Ahithophel's advice. Second of all, if the coup is doomed, probably his days are numbered anyway. So we read these words, "when he saw that his counsel was not followed," - his plans to kill David and get vengeance for Bathsheba and all - he takes his own life. Suicide in the Bible is very rare. The name Ahithophel means "a brother of a fool." I don't know who named him; not his brother. But he dies with full deliberation. By that I mean he made plans, he straightened out his life. It was no emotional kind of reaction in minutes; it was an action that came along with plenty of forethought, if you will. He's a type of Judas who ends his life on the same note. Except for Samson who, in his repentance, asked the LORD for strength to go on a suicide mission, and it did cost him his life. And Saul's armorbearer because he, seeing Saul die, fell on his own sword in fear. We know nothing else about him. Every suicide in the Bible is carried out by individuals who are not walking with the LORD. I'm not saying they didn't know the LORD; I'm saying they weren't walking with the LORD. And I think that's an important distinction. We counsel a lot of people about potential suicide. They always want to know are they going to go to heaven, and my answer is always the same, "I don't know, but I wouldn't take that chance." I will tell you I don't think suicide is the unpardonable sin. It's murder. It's your murder. But it's not a wise way to go; you're certainly not going to find where the Lord wants you to be. And so you do find folks in the Scriptures, every one of them who finds themselves at this place, not walking with God. So that's the first thing. Ahithophel was a man who had a reputation for speaking accurately for the LORD for years. In fact, David will mention him in Psalm 55:13-14 as "a companion who walked with me to the house of God, gave me sweet counsel." There was a definite relationship Ahithophel had to the LORD. So it's just so often suicide tends to be the panic of a moment. You know, if you could get by that moment. We see people that are

very sick and depressed, and then when they start to get better, they kill themselves. They find enough strength to take their life. But after David's sin with Bathsheba and then the murder of Uriah, Ahithophel became a man that was consumed with vengeance. There's no way for him, somehow, to let go and let God handle it. In the end, he could not deliver on the vengeance, so he took his own life. He's a life that (kind of) was consumed by bitterness and, for him, he didn't see it as God taking care of things. He gave up.

When we read - and I think we mentioned it to you a couple of weeks ago - that in 2 Samuel 23 there's a list by name of David's thirty top fighting, elite men. One of them was a fellow named Eliam, who was Ahithophel's boy. He had a daughter named Bathsheba. So Ahithophel - it was his granddaughter. She married a fellow named Uriah, who was also a grandson by marriage to Ahithophel. And just looking at those statistics, it would tell us that Bathsheba was around the palace, and she would have been young enough to be David's granddaughter. I mean, that's the separation in age. We realize that Ahithophel gave a son to fight for David all of those years and a grandson, as well, to David's elite fighting army. So, to him, the sin that David committed was unpardonable. He couldn't forget it. He couldn't forgive it. And he couldn't give it to the LORD. Which is all to say those are not qualities you want in your life. You want to forgive. You want to let God handle it. You want the LORD to be the One that takes vengeance. And Ahithophel is an example of a man overthrown by bitterness. He becomes a type of Judas because Judas also had a plan, and that one didn't work out either. And when he saw that it wasn't going his way, he was so vested in it, that's all he was really interested in. So, David finally wrote in Psalm 41:9, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." But there's a cause-and-effect there.

So suicide's a tough subject. But I suspect if you'll walk with God and let God have your life, as depressed as you might get - like David, and David certainly had lots of reason to be depressed by this point, everyone around him was falling apart, but he found his peace in the LORD, and I think that's the difference. You find these men taking their lives in the Bible. It is, except for those two exceptions I mentioned, always from someone who has disassociated himself with God's promises. So you're left with nothing but the hopelessness that comes from not knowing God. In any event, the answer to that is still come to Jesus and walk with Him.

Verse 24, "Then David" (so we kind of leave Ahithophel there, buried in his own city) "went to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed over the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. And Absalom made Amasa captain of the army instead of Joab" (which was David's nephew). "This Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Jithra, an Israelite, who had gone in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. So Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead. Now it happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the people of Ammon, Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, brought beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds," (they brought the whole store) "sheep and cheese of the herd, for David and the people who were with him to eat. For they said, 'The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness.' " So David's lot is improving. Number one - the counsel of his friend, Hushai, has been received by his son. The arrival, here at Mahanaim (from where Saul had ruled, by the way, for years); - and this, by the way, is the same place Jacob had met the two angels on the way back to meet with Esau, same place, after he had spent all those years with his Uncle Laban - David gets support from the most unlikely sources. The LORD begins to send to him people that, on paper, wouldn't have been there for him. But God began to rally those folks around him. They were friends and supporters. They brought provision for the needs, assurance for the troops. Shobi is Hanun's brother; chapter 10 you can read about him. Machir is a fellow that kept Mephibosheth, that fellow that was lame, for years. And David, because of his kindness to this young man, now brings out his caretaker. Barzillai is a friend of David. He was in his 80's, extremely rich (we are told in 2 Samuel 19), and he brought as much as he could afford to get so that David and his men would be ready for the battle. So, David shows up in the middle of nowhere, and all the supplies come to him, and God provides again. I like the fact that if I run with David through the story, I'm thinkin', "What are we gonna do when we get to nowhere? And what are we gonna do when they find us?" But, instead, God continues to bring David everything he needs to stand fast.

So maybe tonight you're in church, and you go, "Man, I've got problems, and I don't know how to fix 'em." It's probably all right. "Well, I don't know what I'm gonna do." Yeah, that's good. Because David didn't know either. But if you're trusting God, God's faithful, isn't He? He never fails. He never fails. Won't leave you, won't forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). He knows what you need before you ask (Matthew 6:8). But you have to run with David here. He's a 60-year-old man with a

bunch of old people and unarmed folks, and then he's got six hundred guys that are just like tough Marines. But against a coup attempt, that may not be near enough. And yet God has a way.

Well, Absalom replaces Joab, David's troop leader, with another fellow, his cousin, and they gather together there in an offensive position. So the stage is set next week for the battle and then, in chapter 19, for the results. I hope you'll be with us because you don't want to stop in the middle.

A couple of things to walk away with tonight, though. We'll start with David and his assessment of Ziba, this fellow that lied about the fellow that he was caring for; that sometimes misjudgments are made when we don't have the whole story. "Slow to speak, quick to hear, slow to anger" (James 1:19). That's biblical, isn't it? But David was in a difficult position. What David did see with that fellow, Shimei, was that he could look beyond him to the LORD. Right? Falsely accused, he had the power to kill this guy. I mean, if you had the power to kill somebody, and you could get away with it, would that be a harder time to say, "I forgive you"? You might go, "I'm gonna kill him!" And David could have, and no one would have said a word. But David left it with the LORD. God rules in the kingdom of men (Daniel 4:17). Learn from Ahithophel that unresolved bitterness will kill you. It really is not good to harbor that kind of stuff in your heart. I know that people don't make it easy, but you gotta let it go. You gotta let the Lord.....the Lord is the Lord, man! You can be mad at a person or love the Lord. Right? You can't do both, oftentimes. Learn from Hushai and others that lying is never God's way to get His work done. He doesn't need your help. And that was easy to be seen. And then, finally, as we leave David there in the middle of the Ralph's market (at least that's the way it looks like), learn that God will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5) and that even if you're exposed to the wiles of the enemy, God can give you victory, provision and peace. You'll see it here. I know. We're gonna leave David sittin' for a week in the middle of nowhere. You can cheat and read ahead if you want. But we'll pick it up next week.

Let's have communion, shall we?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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