

January 8, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: *The Life of David*
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 2 Samuel 16.

1. Explain why God, being holy, chooses to use sinfulness to accomplish His will.
2. What part do the unkind actions and attitudes of others play in the sanctification of God's children?
3. Have you ever matured in the Lord because people have been unkind, unjust, dishonest, or even mean toward you?
4. What is your response when evil intentions have been directed against you?

WHEN GOD'S WILL DOESN'T FIT OUR PREFERENCES **2 Samuel 16:1-23**

Some of us like things to be neat and orderly, a place for everything and everything in its place. Some people consider people like me to be perfectionists or suffering with O.C.D. But really it is not that extreme. Some people appeal to the obvious orderliness of God Himself as their reason for preferring symmetry in life.

This personality trait causes some of us to not care for modern art or existentialism. We like predictability. If we are looking at a picture of a flower, we expect it to look like a flower with pedals, a stem, and all the parts a flower should have in predictable proportion. The sign on the modern art piece might identify the painting as a picture of a child in the forest. But the painting really does look like

the artist was angry at the canvass and expressed his anger by throwing paint at it. If that is the case, it is really difficult for me to accept that this is a picture of a child in the forest. Who says that it is a child or a forest? The artist? If he wanted it to look like a child in the forest, he should have painted it to look like a child in the forest! It just seems like things ought to look like what they claim to be.

Sometimes God's will looks like modern art. We think we know what God's will should look like because God has revealed so much about His character in the Bible. In light of all that He has told us about Himself, we have no excuse for not understanding what He is essentially like. We know that He is good, right, holy, just, righteous and perfectly sinless. Therefore, are we not accurate to conclude that God's will is always going to reflect those traits? That would seem to be the case.

However, the will of God being in conformity with His character is a huge stumbling block for many modern thinkers. They cannot accept the idea that God's will includes war with all its casualties and disruption of peoples' lives. They cannot imagine that a natural disaster that kills thousands of people could be the will of God. They argue that if there really is a God, and if He is as powerful as the Bible claims He is, why didn't He prevent the catastrophe? And if God is as the Bible presents Him, how could He create hell and send real people to such a place of eternal suffering?

Unbelievers and skeptics are not the only people who struggle with God's will. Even we believers might wonder why God would apparently approve activities that are clearly contrary to His character. More specifically, "How could a person's sin ever be God's will?" Or, in light of the story before us today, "How could God use Hushai's lying to Absalom, or Ahithophel's advising Absalom to have intimate relations with David's concubines in plain sight of the people?" Surely that wasn't God's will!

Again, I say that sometimes God's will looks like modern art to me. I don't completely understand it. Sometimes I don't even like it. It grates against my natural inclination of presuming that God's will is always neat and orderly, predictable. We expect God's will to be very black and white where sin is sin and righteousness is righteousness. Our story reveals that such simplicity is not always the case in God's work. The wonderful truth is that, in spite of human

frailty, sin, and wickedness, God still accomplishes His purpose and His will in life. It appears that David understood that God was working His will even through the sin and unkindness of others—and he was confident and satisfied with it.

God's Will Allows People to Add Insult to Injury (vv.1-14).

Even in the will of God, He allows deceivers to deceive (vv.1-4). One such deceiver in David's life was a fellow named Ziba who showed up at a stressful time with a load of gifts. Why the gifts from Ziba? Ziba brought substantial supplies to the fleeing king. *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 (v.1).*

In order to understand what took place here, we do well to remember that Ziba was from the tribe of Benjamin, the people of former King Saul. In fact, he had been the servant of King Saul. Saul had made himself David's enemy. God had removed Saul from the throne in order to establish David as king. Not everyone understood or accepted God's intervention in that matter.

After God had established David as king, he had reached out to Ziba in order to show kindness to Saul's household. He had put Ziba in charge of managing all of Saul's estate which now belonged to Mephibosheth, grandson of Saul, son of Jonathan. Now this fellow showed up at a critical time with donkeys and loads of food. In light of this massive provision in a time of need, it would appear that Ziba was loyal to the new king.

But things are not always as they appear. There is a lesson of wisdom we need to consider at this point. Solomon taught that a brother who has been offended is hard to win. He wrote, *A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle (Proverbs 18:19)*. In life's circumstances, it may appear that an offense has been forgiven, covered over, or forgotten. But given an opportunity for vengeance, the old wound can pop open and be a sore spot. It is human nature that in times of pressure and distress the offended person will often look for opportunity for pay back.

We know from information later on in the David story that Ziba had ulterior motives here. Knowing what we learn in chapter nineteen, we can see duplicity under the surface of this conversation. That is why Ziba evaded the truth when David asked some pointed questions. *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" (v.2)*. Ziba's reply to David's question was true on the surface. He did bring a substantial provision of staples. In fact, the list of what Ziba brought looks a lot like what Abigail brought to David and his men years earlier (1 Samuel 25).

However, we must realize that the deceiver brought supplies in order to supplant his master. The real plan was to take over Saul's estate for himself. It is even possible that Ziba had visions of kingship for himself. Was this obvious? There was at least doubt. David's questions indicate he had some suspicion of Ziba's motives. He asked where Mephibosheth, the recipient of the king's blessing, was. Why didn't he show up? *And the king said, "And where is your master's son?"*

Ziba lied about his master. *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'" (v.3)*. David's suspicion is obvious now as he wonders why Mephibosheth, to whom he showed so much kindness, didn't come with Ziba. The question brought Ziba's dishonesty to light. Now he told a bold-faced lie, which revealed that his real intentions were to malign and displace his master.

The sad part of this story is that David made an errant decision based on untruth. *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" (v.4)*. David gave all of Saul's estate to Ziba. He had the authority to do that because he was still the king. Why did God allow David to be deceived? Why did God allow David to make this bad decision? Was it really God's will for David to be deceived by this cunning, evil man?

If you have ever made a decision based on untruth, you know that it can put you in difficult circumstances. I remember a case some years ago in which I was given information about a tense situation. I assumed the information was true, made a decision based on it, and did not hesitate to explain why I decided what I decided when someone asked. In short order, I was accused of lying because I had accepted misinformation as truth.

Is it really God's will for His people to be placed in difficult circumstances because other people's sin? As we step back and look at the broader picture, we discover that in times like these God is shaping and molding His servant. Sanctification, that is, learning to live according to the righteousness God gave us at salvation, is a life-long process. The process of sanctification has to include discipline. Through discipline, God helps us see that we have fallen short of righteousness. Through discipline, God prods us to desire righteousness.

Not only does God's will allow deceivers to deceive, but it also allows for vengeful people to vent (vv.5-14). One of Saul's relatives capitalized on an opportunity to show the king disrespect (vv.5-8). Shimei was Saul's relative. *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 (v.5a)*. Like Ziba, probably Shimei held lingering resentment toward David. Now that many people had risen up against the king who appeared to have taken Saul's throne, Shimei decided to pile on. Maybe he had visions of becoming king because he was related to the former king.

This evil fellow showed incredible disrespect to the king. *And as he came he cursed continually. 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 and on his left. And Shimei said as he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man!" (vv.6b-7)*. This was the most disrespectful actions a man could show toward an authority in that day. It reminds us of the situation a few years ago when on December 14, 2008, Muntadhar al-Zaidi shouted, "This is a farewell kiss from the Iraqi people, you dog," and threw his shoes at then-U.S. president, George W. Bush, during a Baghdad press conference. In American culture, throwing a shoe at someone

might be considered unfriendly. But in Iraqi culture, it is a most grievous insult. The only other person to have cursed David according to the Bible record was Goliath. Things didn't turn out too well for him.

The interesting fact is, that in God's eyes, before David confessed his sin and was forgiven, David was a man of blood and worthless. But David had confessed his sin to God. Therefore, to call him a man of blood and a worthless fellow was not an accurate conclusion now. God had forgiven David's sin. Furthermore, it was not Shimei's place to make that kind of accusation.

No doubt Shimei thought he expressed much of God's will, but he was not accurate. He said, *"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"* (v.8). But, David never shed the blood of anyone in Saul's house. In fact, David had guarded himself and others from doing that very thing, as in the case of Abner or when Abishai wanted to kill Saul. Even after this situation when David allowed the Gibeonites to kill two of Saul's sons and five of his grandsons, the choice was not his but was according to God's rule for covering Saul's offense against the people of Gibeon (2 Samuel 21).

Nor was it accurate to imply that David displaced Saul and reigned in his stead? David sitting on the throne over Israel was God's choice and God's work. It was true that God had given the kingdom into Absalom's hand—but only temporarily. God did not truly take the kingdom away from David. Nor had God threatened to do that.

It is important to see how the king willingly accepted vengeance against himself (vv.9-14). David's bodyguard sought permission to kill the vengeful fool. *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"* (v.9). Abishai was simply doing his job of protecting the king. We have to appreciate his demonstration of loyalty at such a difficult time in David's life.

But David didn't need human intervention. He understood the secret things of the LORD's will. Maybe God inspired Shimei's disrespect. *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?'" (v.10). "Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to" (v.11b). David understood that it was the LORD's will for Shimei to accuse him and embarrass him. In fact, David was content to believe that God sent Shimei for this very task.

What? How could that be God's will? David understood that even troubles are part of God's will for molding His servants. He wrote these conclusions: "For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me" (Psalm 38:2). "Remove your stroke from me; I am spent by the hostility of your hand" (Psalm 39:10). "You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoil" (Psalm 44:10). "O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry; oh, restore us" (Psalm 60:1).

Furthermore, David asked Abishai if Shimei's disrespect was any worse than the disrespect his own son Absalom had shown. *And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite!"* (v.11a).

But even in the midst of this intolerable shame and embarrassment, David hoped for God's help. He mused, "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." 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 (vv.12-13). If God restored David to the throne, it would be proof that Shimei's accusation was wrong. Sometimes God's vindication of His servant takes a long time. We will discover, when Solomon comes to the throne and David has died, that Shimei will pay dearly for his disrespect.

A very brief statement serves as an interlude to the stressful situation and speaks volumes about David's relationship to the LORD. David was refreshed. *And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself* (v.14). How was he refreshed? Physically of course. But he was also refreshed spiritually. Read the Psalm he wrote at this time in his life. A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON. *O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me;*

many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people! (Psalm 3:1-8). David taught us is that the servant who truly trusts God is able to accept injustices leveled against himself.

So-Called Godly Counsel Might Not Appear to be Very Godly (vv.15-23).

Another example of God's will that we might not understand is that even the good guy wasn't exactly honest (vv.15-19). The counselor's presence at the palace prompted questions (vv.15-16). Hushai the counselor showed up in Jerusalem according to plan. *Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. And when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom* (vv.15-16a). No doubt everyone expected Ahithophel the counselor to be at the palace in Jerusalem because he has already declared allegiance to Absalom. But Hushai was a close friend of David. Why was he at the palace?

Arriving at the palace to welcome the new king, Hushai feigned allegiance to the interloper. *Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"* (v.16b). It is very important to see what Hushai did not say, "Long live King Absalom." He spoke truth as he expressed the desire for the true king, the rightful king to live long. This is an example of good shrewdness.

We can understand why the interloping king wondered what was going on. *And Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?"* (v.17). Of course Hushai's actions looked suspicious. Either he was pretending to be loyal to Absalom, or he had never truly been loyal to David. Either way, the man's loyalty and faithfulness was rightfully doubted.

How can God bless a man who lies? *And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, for whom the LORD and this people and all the men*

of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you” (vv.18-19). When questioned by Absalom, Hushai did not directly tell the real reason why he came to Absalom. We know that the real plan was for him to be a spy working with the priests Zadok and Abiathar (15:34-37). We also know that David planned for Hushai to subvert the counsel of Ahithophel. For obvious reasons Hushai concealed that truth.

At the same time, much of what Hushai said was true in a covert kind of way. When Absalom wondered why he, David’s friend, was there expressing loyalty to him, Hushai replied *“No, for whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain” (v.18).* It was very clear that the LORD had chosen David to be king. At no point in all of the LORD’s promises about consequences did He mention removing David from being king. Also, it was clear in the past that the people of Judah and Israel had chosen David to be king. That Absalom was able to deceive many of the people did not mean that the majority was in favor of choosing him to be king.

But what about Hushai’s statement, *And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son?(v.19a).* If Solomon, the son of David, was the new king, there is no doubt Hushai would serve him. The only question at this time was which son?

The fact remains that Hushai intended to deceive Absalom. He said, *“As I have served your father, so I will serve you” (v.19).* That was patently untrue. This is the ages’ old dilemma of God using human instruments that are not altogether truthful to accomplish His will. The classic example of the problem is the prostitute in Jericho who lied about where the spies from Israel were. God prevented the men from Jericho from finding His spies. And God blessed the woman who lied. He called her a woman of faith (Hebrews 11:31). She was even set up as an example of a person whose good works demonstrated her faith (James 2:25). But that does not imply that God ordains or approves of lying. Could God have accomplished His will without her lie? No doubt, though that becomes a matter of speculation.

And so we will see how God used Hushai’s advice in a miraculous way to protect David who He was going to restore to the

throne. A lesson for us is that it is possible in the course of things that a child of God will lie. It is also possible that God will do His will for His own glory through that dishonest person in spite of the sin. Nevertheless, the person who lies is still responsible before God for the sin. And if he or she is truly a child of God, they will be convicted of the sin, confess it and repent.

Another questionable part of God’s will in this story is that the man whose counsel was like the word of God gave wicked advice (vv.20-23). He gave advice that is clearly contrary to godliness. *Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give your counsel. What shall we do?” Ahithophel said to Absalom, “Go in to your father’s concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened.” So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel (vv.20-22).*

In that culture, a man’s concubines were virtually the same as wives. Often a man would use concubines specifically to increase his male offspring so that his name would not disappear from the earth. That was the case with Abraham and Hagar (Sarah’s handmaid) which was a human plan totally outside of God’s revealed will. Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, repeated the same foolishness with Bilhah and Zilpah, the maids of his two wives Leah and Rachel.

But this act that Ahithophel recommended was about as reprehensible as anything a man could do in Israel. On one hand, it was not unusual for the victorious king in battle to take the defeated king’s wives and concubines. It proved that he had taken over the kingdom. On the other hand, this whole plan was to make Absalom (the favored and spoiled son) a stench to his father. We will see at the end of the Absalom story that, stench or not, David still loved his son. But that was love on a human level, not godly love that would help the man.

We are left to wonder how could a man who God had blessed give such wicked advice? Ahithophel had a reputation of speaking God’s truth. *Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom (v.23).* But at this point in his life, he was driven by human passions, not God’s

truth. Why? Consider what the list of David's thirty mighty men tell us about relationships. We read that *Eliam the son of Ahithophel of Gilo (2 Samuel 23:34b)* was one of David's mighty men. Now go back to the tragic situation when David saw and took Bathsheba. *And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (2 Samuel 11:3)*. Bathsheba was Eliam's daughter. That made her the granddaughter of Ahithophel. According to human weakness, Ahithophel had good reason to unleash his pent-up vengeance by giving wicked advice.

But at the same time, we need to remember David's prayer. He prayed quite specifically when he learned disconcerting news. *And it was told David, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (2 Samuel 15:31)*. Was this part of God confounding Ahithophel's thinking?

Most important we need to remember one of God's promised consequences for David's sin. *Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun" (2 Samuel 12:11)*. God simply used the sinful choices of sinful men to carry out His promises. The sinful people were responsible for their actions. But in the process, God was tempering His servant David to make him more like Himself.

This story reminds us of what William Cowper wrote in the song *God Moves in Mysterious Ways*.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

God's will is not always simple and not always easily understood. But often what appears to us to be actions and events outside His will are actually God using even the wickedness or spiritual blindness of others to shape us into the image of Christ our Savior.