

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"How Do You Deal with Fools?"*

We paused our verse by verse study in Luke's gospel to look at the account of Shimei cursing David. There is one more important detail from this account before we move on.

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But let me briefly review first...

David was experiencing one of the lowest points in his life:

- He lost the throne.
- His wicked son, Absalom, is the one who stole it from him.
- Much of the nation joined Absalom.

David was fleeing Jerusalem, and when you think things couldn't get any worse, Shimei finds him.

Look at verse 8...

**2 Samuel 16:8 The Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood."**

Shimei is related to Saul. Even though Saul lost the throne and died decades earlier, he still blames David for all of Saul's misfortune.

We tend to think that with time people move on. Sometimes they do, but other times the roots of bitterness continue to go grow and become even deeper as each year passes. That was the case with Shimei. He probably despised David more now than he did when Saul died.

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Look at **verse 9**...

**2 Samuel 16:9 Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head."**

Keep in mind that at least one of David's mighty men was encouraging him to have Shimei executed.

Look at **verse 10**...

**2 Samuel 16:10 But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" 11 And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to.**

Notice the phrase **leave him alone, and let him curse**.

The longer I'm a pastor the greater wisdom I see in these words. You might circle them, underline them, highlight them, or do whatever you need to do to remember them so you can come back to them when people slander you.

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In the previous sermon I explained the difference between gossip and slander. Let me briefly remind you:

- Gossip is spreading negative information about people to others who have no business knowing that information. But at least the information is true.
- Slander is spreading lies about people.

Shimei is not gossiping about David. He is slandering him. He is falsely accusing him of violently overthrowing the house of Saul. But as we have talked about, it was just the opposite:

- Think of David playing music to alleviate Saul of his torment and repeatedly sparing his life
- Think of David's friendship with Jonathan
- Think of David's grace toward Saul's grandson Mephibosheth

David knew what Shimei was saying was untrue and this allowed him to remain silent...and this brings us to lesson one...

### Lesson One: Let a clear conscience keep you silent.

You might remember in our last sermon when David became king again. Shimei did a 180 and came back to David and apologized. Here's part of what he said...

#### **2 Samuel 19:19 Do not let the king take it to heart.**

Well, in a sense, David didn't have to take it to heart because he knew it wasn't true.

When people slander us, it is difficult not to respond:

- We want to defend ourselves.
- We want to explain what really happened.
- We want to say, *"This isn't right. This is a lie. How could you say this?"*

As difficult as it is to be slandered, there's a verse that can greatly encourage us.

Turn to **1 Peter 3**.

#### **1 Peter 3:16 Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.**

Peter says having a good conscience allows us to remain silent when slandered:

If you know the slander against you is untrue then you can disregard it:

- You don't have to give it a second thought
- You don't have to let it ruin your day
- You don't have to let it weigh on you or keep you up at night

Notice the verse tells us what to do instead...

It says **good behavior**. Respond to slander with **good behavior**.

Turn one chapter to the left to **1 Peter 2:12** to see similar instruction...

#### **1 Peter 2:12 Keep YOUR CONDUCT among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they REVILE you as evildoers, they may SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS and glorify God on the day of visitation.**

The ESV says **revile**, but the NASB and some other translations say **slander**, because **reviling** and **slandering** are synonymous.

Look at **verse 15**...

**1 Peter 2:15 For this is the will of God, that BY DOING GOOD you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.**

You can't miss the emphasis on responding with godly behavior...

- **1 Peter 3:16 Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your GOOD BEHAVIOR in Christ may be put to shame.**
- **1 Peter 2:12 Keep YOUR CONDUCT among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they revile you as evildoers, they may SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS and glorify God on the day of visitation.**
- **1 Peter 2:15 For this is the will of God, that by DOING GOOD you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.**

Peter repeatedly says to respond to slander with godly behavior.

And in **verse 15** notice this is how to **silence the ignorance of foolish people**, or we would say fools.

So, respond to fools with godly behavior...and this brings us to lesson two...

### **Lesson Two: Respond to fools with godly behavior.**

Peter says to silence fools by doing good or by responding with godly behavior.

This means keep:

- Serving the Lord
- Remaining faithful
- Having joy
- Investing your time and energy with brothers and sisters in Christ

Most of the pastors I have developed close friendships with, or maybe I should say all the pastors I have developed close friendships with, have told me about times that they had to put up with their own Shimeis.

One of those friends is Cary Green. We developed a close relationship when he was going through something difficult in his church and he reached out to me.

When we went up and stayed with them, Katie was talking to Cary's wife, Lois, about it, a woman she looks up to, because she seemed to handle it so effortlessly. Here's what Lois told Katie, which Katie and I have repeated to each other over the years...

*"There's too much work to do for the Lord, and there are too many people to love and serve."*

Lois recognized that these people could be huge distractions and the best thing they could do was respond with godly behavior. Lois didn't want to waste valuable time and energy. She knew there was too much important work to do.

One of the other wonderful things about responding with godly behavior is it maintains a good witness to the unbelieving world. This is what Peter said...

**1 Peter 2:12 Keep your conduct AMONG THE GENTILES HONORABLE, so that when they [slander NASB and AMP] you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.**

Do good so the unbelieving world looks on and doesn't believe the slander.

Fools don't want you to be godly, because then their slander is shown to be untrue:

- They want you to be ungodly:

- They want you to live down to what they are saying.

David sets a great example for us:

- Take the high road.
- Maintain your composure.

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We talk about why David was the Man after God's own heart, and I see many ways he looks like Jesus in this account...

First, do you remember when Peter wanted to take out his sword and start killing Jesus' attackers? Jesus rebuked him.

David had his own Peter in Abishai. He wanted to take out his sword and kill Shimei. David rebuked Abishai like Jesus rebuked Peter.

If you're being slandered you're probably going to have Peters and Abishais in your life who want to take out swords and start chopping off ears and heads. You might also have to tell them not to retaliate.

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For the second similarity between David and Jesus, look at **verse 23**...

**1 Peter 2:23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**

Jesus entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly, referring to God the Father, and David did too. When Shimei slandered him, he said...

**2 Samuel 16:12 It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me,**

David also entrusted Himself to the Lord.

And this is exactly what we need to do. We should take it to the Lord and trust Him to deal with it.

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The third and most obvious way David looks like Jesus is regarding their silence...

Nobody has ever been slandered as much as Christ. And the worst Christ was ever slandered was at the trials leading up to His crucifixion. If there has ever been a time when it must have been difficult to remain silent, it was then. Yet that is exactly what Christ did...

**When he was reviled** – which is synonymous with slandered – **He did not revile** – or slander – **in return...He did not threaten.**

Jesus was silent to those slandering Him, David was silent to Shimei slandering him, and we should be silent too, and this brings us to lesson three...

**Lesson Three: Don't respond to fools with words.**

Here's another way you could look at it. Peter tells us:

- How to respond: with godly behavior
- How not to respond: with words

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And think of how well David demonstrated this with Shimei...

He did talk in the account, and he even rebuked...but not to Shimei. He rebuked his men and told them to leave Shimei alone. That's how committed David was to ignoring Shimei: he wouldn't even let his men address him.

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David describes his approach in the psalms...

**Psalm 38:13 I am like a deaf man; I do not hear, like a mute man who does not open his mouth.**

He acts like someone who can't even hear what's being said about him.

**Psalm 39:2 I was mute and silent; I held my peace to no avail, (now listen to this...) and my distress grew worse.**

It wasn't easy for him to remain silent. It got harder and harder.

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A few verses later David wrote...

**Psalm 39:8 Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool! 9a I am mute; I do not open my mouth.**

David was committed to remaining silent when scorned by fools.

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And there are some good examples in Scripture of other people remaining silent. Let me share a couple of them with you...

When Hezekiah was king of Judah, he was attacked by the Assyrians.

Sennacherib was the king of Assyria, and he was antagonizing the Jews...

**2 Kings 18:15 Do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand!"**

Sennacherib is doing everything he can to get the Jews to respond. It isn't working so he steps up his game...

**2 Kings 18:16 And his servants said still more against the Lord God and against his servant Hezekiah. 17 And he wrote letters to cast contempt on the Lord, the God of Israel**

Words weren't working, so he even started writing letters!

**2 Kings 18:18 [the Assyrians] shouted...with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city.**

What we see with Sennacherib and the Assyrians is common with foolish people. If you don't respond, they get angrier and angrier.

I only read a few verses, but if I had read all of them you would see there is no response from the Jews. And here's why...

**2 Kings 18:36 The people were silent and answered him not a word, for [Hezekiah's] command was, "Do not answer him."**

Hezekiah didn't just discourage the Jews from responding. He commanded them not to respond!

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Jeremiah was the prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah. He told the Jews to submit to Babylon:

- Submitting to Babylon meant submitting to the Lord.
- Rebelling against Babylon meant rebelling against the Lord.

The false prophets had a field day with this. They were:

- contradicting everything Jeremiah said
- prophesying falsely to the people
- and spreading lies about Jeremiah: they said that he was trying to destroy Jerusalem with his prophecies of judgment, when he was actually trying to save the nation. Their false prophecies were going to destroy it.

It must have been incredibly difficult for Jeremiah to remain silent, but he did. Let me share one account with you...

The prophets often used object lessons. Jeremiah was told to make a yoke and put it on his shoulders to show that the Jews were supposed to submit to Babylon.

A false prophet named Hananiah knew how good it sounded to tell the people that God would defeat Babylon...but it was a lie. So, listen to this...

**Jeremiah 28:10 The prophet Hananiah took the yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke them. 11a And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, “Thus says the Lord: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years.”**

Picture what this looked like...

Hananiah walked up to Jeremiah, took the yoke off his shoulders, and broke it in front of the people. Then he turned and said, *“This is exactly what God said He is going to do to Babylon.”*

Now you’re on the edge of your seat, aren’t you?

Hananiah performed this dramatic act in front of the people:

- He made Jeremiah look bad
- He declared that Jeremiah’s prophecies were false

So what did Jeremiah do? How did he respond to such a fool?

**Jeremiah 28:11b But Jeremiah the prophet went his way.**

That’s it! He just walked away. He didn’t say anything.

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Listen to this quote I heard one time that should encourage us to respond similarly to fools...

*“When you roll around in the mud with a pig, you both get muddy, but the pig likes it.”*

Fools are in the mud, and they want you to get in the mud with them:

- They want you to respond.
- They want to know they’ve upset you and gotten under your skin.

Few things are more upsetting to fools than silence. When you don’t respond, they feel ignored and you’re depriving them of the joy they would have if you argued with them.

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The longer I’m in ministry the more convinced I become of three things:

1. Fools want you to respond

2. The best thing you can do is ignore them
3. The worst thing you can do is respond.

Responding is simply pouring fuel on the fire. If you don't respond I'm not guaranteeing the fire will go out. But if you do respond I can almost guarantee the fire will get even worse.

We should learn from David's example and say, *"Leave them alone. Let them curse."*

Let me share a story with you from when I taught elementary school that illustrates this...

I had a student, and we are going to say his name is Brian. I liked him, but I don't know if I had another student who had as much trouble remaining calm and not responding to people antagonizing him.

And students can be like sharks in the water smelling blood. They knew they could get a rise out of him so that encouraged them to harass him even more.

I sat down with Brian on more than one occasion and explained to him that every time he got upset, he was doing what they wanted.

I shared a fishing analogy with him...

*"They cast in the hook, they want you to bite, you do, and then they start reeling you in...making you madder and madder and madder...which they want. You're responding because you're angry. But if you really want to upset them you need to ignore them. That is the best thing you can do."*

I want to look at a few verses in Proverbs that support all this. Go ahead and turn to **Proverbs 12:16**.

There are two reasons to understand fools as they are described in Proverbs:

1. First, so we know how to deal with fools.
2. Second, so we can avoid being foolish ourselves. Even though certain people are identified as fools, there's some foolishness in all of us. Learning about fools can convict us of our own foolishness.

I know I have been foolish in my life and few things convict me more than reading about fools.

One more thing...

Whenever we read Proverbs, we need to remember it is wisdom literature versus law, and we don't read wisdom and law the same:

- An example of law literature would be Leviticus, which provides commands. It is black and white. You are told what you can and can't do. It requires self-control, but it doesn't require wisdom.
- Wisdom literature gives us principles and generalities that allow us to navigate situations well.

The fool is one of the most common topics in Proverbs mentioned 78 times. We don't have the time to look at all the verses, but I have chosen some that support what we are discussing.

I don't want to spend much time flipping around, so I've tried to arrange the Proverbs in a way that you won't have to turn many pages between them.

**Proverbs 12:16 The vexation of a fool is known at once (this is Shimei, Sennacherib, and Hananiah), but the prudent ignores an insult (this is David, Hezekiah, and Jeremiah).**

**Vexation** means wrath, which is how it's translated in the NKJV, or anger, which is how it's translated in the NASB.

Fools get angry quickly, but the **prudent** – or wise – **ignore an insult** or remain silent.

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Look at **Proverbs 14:7**...

**Proverbs 14:7 Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.**

This goes beyond just remaining silent. Now we're told to get away from fools altogether.

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Look at **Proverbs 23:9**...

**Proverbs 23:9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words.**

Now we're told why we shouldn't speak to fools: they will hate your words. It will just make them madder. It is pouring fuel on the fire.

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Look at **Proverbs 29:11**...

**Proverbs 29:11 A fool gives full vent to his spirit (again, this is Shimei, Sennacherib, and Hananiah), but a wise man quietly holds it back (again, this is David, Hezekiah, and Jeremiah).**

Again, fools can't control themselves. They lose their temper. But wise, or mature people, exhibit self-control and that self-control looks like **quietly holding back** from saying anything.

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Next look at **Proverbs 26:4** to see two interesting proverbs...

**Proverbs 26:4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.**

It is so foolish to answer a fool you must be a fool to do so.

Answering a fool makes you like the fool, hence the quote, *“Don't argue with a fool because people listening won't be able to tell the difference.”*

Look at the next verse...

**Proverbs 26:5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.**

This looks like a contradiction in Scripture, doesn't it? This verse says the opposite of the previous verse:

- Do not answer a fool.
- Then answer a fool.

There is no contradiction. These verses capture the dilemma with fools:

- You shouldn't answer a fool for the reasons we've discussed.
- You should answer a fool or else they will **be wise in [their] own eyes**, which means they'll continue to think they know everything.

The verse is not defending responding to fools. Instead, it is discouraging responding to fools...while pointing out how hard it is not to.

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Along those lines, look at our last verse, **Proverbs 27:3**, which is a nice way to conclude...

**Proverbs 27:3 A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both.**

You almost want to read this and say, “Amen!”

It is hard not to respond to fools when they provoke you:

- We want to argue.
- We want to get the last word.

But here are three things that are encouraging...

First, God knows that it’s hard not to respond to fools.

I always appreciate that when God speaks to us through His word, He often reveals that He understands what we are going through...and that is the point of this verse. He says, “It is easier to lift a heavy rock or lots of sand than it is to remain silent to a fool...but be wise and remain silent.”

Second, because it is hard not to respond to fools, it says something about people when they can remain silent: they’re mature and self-controlled.

Third, remaining silent allows us to look like Christ, and this brings us to our last lesson...

#### Lesson Four: Silence in the face of false accusations looks like Christ.

In our loud, obnoxious world, it is harder to look like Christ in this way, because our world celebrates antagonistic proud people. Social media has made this incredibly worse. People are given platforms where they can gossip and slander, and other bitter people can encourage them by liking, commenting, and sharing.

But one of the wonderful ways to look like Christ, is to remain silent...

**Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers IS SILENT, SO HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH.**

The focus is on Jesus’s silence in the face of opposition that pales in comparison to anything we experience.

We see the fulfillment in the Gospels...

**Luke 23:8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.**

Herod heard about Jesus’s miracles, so he wanted to see Him perform some.

**Luke 23:9 [Herod] questioned [Jesus] at some length, but HE MADE NO ANSWER.**

Jesus knew Herod was a foolish man who wasn’t interested in learning, so He didn’t respond.

**Matthew 26:62 The high priest said [to Jesus], “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” 63a But JESUS REMAINED SILENT.**

Another trial...

**Matthew 27:12 When [Jesus] was accused by the chief priests and elders, HE GAVE NO ANSWER. 13 Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” 14 But HE GAVE HIM NO ANSWER, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.**

Christ didn't argue or stoop to the level of His accusers, and His silence even amazed Pilate. Your silence can similarly amaze unbelievers who have to admire your maturity and self-control.

And we are to follow Christ's example...

**1 Peter 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.**

We're told to follow Christ's example, and Peter describes that example for us...

**1 Peter 2:23 When [Jesus] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**

And this is my encouragement to myself and all of you...

When fools revile you or threaten you, don't revile or threaten in return. Instead, trust yourself to God who judges justly.

Let Christ's example be the encouragement you need.

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If you have any questions or I can pray for you in any way I will be up front after service and it would be a privilege to be able to speak to you.

Let's pray.