

My Own Son Seeks My Life
2 Samuel 15:16-16:23
October 8, 2023
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CenterPoint Church

Read 2 Samuel 15:16-16:23

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
(Hebrews 4:12)

Introduction

There's an old country music song by Tracy Lawrence called "Find Out Who Your Friends Are." Some of the words are: "Get yourself in a bind, lose the shirt off your back / Need a floor, need a couch, need a bus fare... You find out who your friends are / Somebody's gonna drop everything / Run out and crank up their car / Hit the gas, get there fast / Never stop to think, 'What's in it for me?' / Or 'It's way too far' / They just show on up with their big 'ole heart / When the water's high / When the weather's not so fair / When the well runs dry / Who's gonna be there? / You find out who your friends are."

Maybe you've been in a position in life where the bottom has fallen out or where you feel helpless or in great need. People that don't know you well are not going to show up for you in that moment; casual acquaintances and fair-weather friends won't make any sacrifices to find out how they can help. But your true friends will be there for you - they'll stick up for you, they'll bring you a hot meal and sit and listen, offering you a shoulder to cry on and their absolute loyalty. In our Scripture passage this morning, King David's life had bottomed out - he was fleeing Jerusalem anticipating that his own son, Absalom, was bringing an army to attack him. It's a moment where every Israelite needed to make a choice: stick with the old king or throw in your lot with the new king. David is about to find out who his true friends are, and who was only loyal to him until they found a better offer. It's a reminder that everyone has an agenda, everyone chooses sides in a conflict, and you can't trust or please everyone. But it's going to point us to some greater lessons in our own lives; let's work through the passage so that we can get there. The first section describes a group of

I. Those Loyal to David (15:16 - 16:2)

¹⁶ So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. ¹⁷ And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house. ¹⁸ And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king. ¹⁹ Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. ²⁰ You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you." ²¹ But Ittai answered the king, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be." ²² And David said to Ittai, "Go then, pass on." So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. ²³ And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness. ²⁴ And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the city. ²⁵ Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. ²⁶ But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,'

behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him.”²⁷ The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Are you not a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar.²⁸ See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.”²⁹ So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.³⁰ But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.³¹ 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.”³² While David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head.³³ David said to him, “If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me.³⁴ But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father’s servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,’ then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel.³⁵ Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So whatever you hear from the king’s house, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests.³⁶ Behold, their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok’s son, and Jonathan, Abiathar’s son, and by them you shall send to me everything you hear.”³⁷ So Hushai, David’s friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

16:1: When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine.² And the king said to Ziba, “Why have you brought these?” Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink.”

I know that there are a lot of names and people to keep straight here, so let me make it easy for us by breaking them up into three different groups. When we talk about the ways that we serve God, we often use the phrase “our time, talent, and treasure.” Here we see people who were loyal to David in those ways - willing to serve him with their time, talent, and treasure.

Time

David was certainly not just slinking out of Jerusalem with his family and a few servants. This was a massive group of thousands that included three groups of foreigners, including 600 men and their families who were Gittites, that is Philistines. The narrator focuses in on one Philistine man, Ittai, who was possibly their leader. David tried to let him off the hook; my paraphrase of his advice is: “You don’t need to join us; we don’t know where we’re going or how long we’ll be away. Take your brothers and go back home to your own land and king; you don’t need to take sides in this civil war, it’s not your fight. May the Lord prosper you in the future just for being willing to help me.” Ittai would have none of that. He vowed his allegiance to David even if it meant death. He used a double oath: “*as the Lord lives*” and “*as the king lives.*” This was a man who had grown up in the pagan land among Israel’s enemies who made a vow using the phrase, “As Yahweh lives.” This man had become both a true friend of David’s and a true believer in David’s God. He was staying to fight to the end. This is a condemnation of the people who had been swayed by the young upstart, Absalom – that foreigners are more loyal than David’s own people.

Talent

We’re going to see two men in particular who serve David with their talents – Zadok and Hushai. When I was an undergrad at Baylor University, I was in a choir that sang a song that was called “Zadok the Priest” by the composer Handel (the Handel’s “Messiah” guy). When we sang it, I thought, “This is the most obscure choral anthem ever. No one’s ever heard of this, I don’t know where our director dug this out.” It turns out that “Zadok the Priest” is quite famous; it’s been sung

at every coronation of a monarch in England since Handel wrote it for the coronation of King George II in 1727. It has the phrases “God save the king! Long live the king!” sung over and over. If any of you watched King Charles’ coronation back in May, it was sung there as well.

Zadok and his fellow priest, Abiathar, served two functions in this section:

- 1) Taking the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. David wanted it there so that if God restored Jerusalem to him, then it would be there waiting; and if God didn’t restore Jerusalem to him, then David didn’t deserve it. There’s a sense that David was saying that the Ark is not a magical charm that would ensure his safety. His deliverance would be by God Himself.
- 2) Being part of David’s spy network, along with their sons. David needed eyes and ears on the ground in Jerusalem who could report back to him what Absalom was doing.

In verse 31, David prayed that the Lord would turn the counsel of his former advisor (who was now Absalom’s advisor), a man named Ahithophel, into foolishness. And almost immediately a man named Hushai showed up, and bam – David had the answer to his prayer. He would send Hushai as a spy both to subvert Ahithophel’s advice and to send back to David anything he learned. Hushai is called “David’s friend” and happily accepts the assignment; we’ll hear more from him in the coming two chapters.

Treasure

We met this servant, Ziba, back in chapter 9. Here he brought gifts to David, which included animals, food, and wine. These are almost the exact same things that Abigail gave David before he was king – 200 loaves of bread, 100 bunches of raisins, 100 portions of summer fruit, and wine. It’s a reminder that just as God had provided for David through his people in his fugitive days before he took the throne, he was providing in these later fugitive days as well.¹ Just as Ittai gave of his time, Zadok and Hushai gave of their talents, so Ziba gave of his treasure.

We turn now from those who were loyal to David to

II. Those Cursing David (16:3-14)

³ And the king said, “And where is your master’s son?” Ziba said to the king, “Behold, he remains in Jerusalem, for he said, ‘Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father.’” ⁴ Then the king said to Ziba, “Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.” And Ziba said, “I pay homage; let me ever find favor in your sight, my lord the king.” ⁵ When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually. ⁶ And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. ⁷ And Shimei said as he cursed, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! ⁸ The Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.” ⁹ Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.” ¹⁰ But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’” ¹¹ And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. ¹² It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today.” ¹³ So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside

¹ Robert S. Chisholm Jr, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2013), p. 261.

opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust. ¹⁴ And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself.

Remember Mephibosheth who we also met in chapter 9? David sought him out because he was Jonathan's son to show him kindness by restoring land to him and letting him eat at the royal table. It was a beautiful story that showed David's covenant loyalty to the memory of his best friend and elevated a crippled man who had nothing to the status of a royal son. But here, we find out from his servant, Ziba, that Mephibosheth had stayed in Jerusalem, hoping that Absalom's rebellion would somehow result in him taking the throne of Israel that his grandfather, Saul, had sat on. If this is true, that makes Mephibosheth one of the most ungrateful, scheming, con artists in Israel's history. David apparently believed Ziba and handed over all of Mephibosheth's land and possessions to him. Stay tuned, though, because after the fighting is over, we'll hear a different story that will bring Ziba's motives into question.

Shimei is an interesting case. He was either related to Saul or part of his tribe, but he had apparently carried a grudge towards David for many years, storing up this flood of abuse that he unleashed here. His first and last insults toward David are translated here as "*man of blood*," but as Jonathan Kirsch comments, "even this rich and resonant phrase may not convey the gall that boiled up in Shimei at the sight of the deposed king... an alternative and perhaps more accurate translation of the same phrase: 'You bloodstained fiend of hell!'"² It takes a lot of gall to yell that at the king as he's surrounded by thousands of men. His main accusation was that Absalom's taking the kingdom was clearly the Lord's punishment for shedding the blood of Saul's house. This might have been a common sentiment in the land – that David was responsible for the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, Abner, and Ish-bosheth. Shimei was a man who listened to the rumors – that David had been living among the Philistines when Saul and Jonathan were killed, so he must have been responsible. The men who killed Ish-bosheth, Saul's son who had set up a rival kingship after Saul's death, took his head to David, so therefore David must have ordered the hit. But in all of those instances, David was innocent – he mourned Saul's death and was greatly distraught by his best friend, Jonathan's death; he immediately executed the men who killed Ish-bosheth. David was a guilty man, but not of those specific sins. Yes, he was a murderer, but not of Saul and his men.

David's men were ready to take Shimei's head off, but David had a mature response to his taunts: "Hey, compared to Absalom trying to kill me, this guy's curses are nothing. There's a chance that the Lord has given him the words, anyways; so either I deserve it, or God will repay me for enduring this wrong." It says that David went on the road while Shimei continued to hurl insults as well as actual stones from the hillside. So, literally David was taking the low road, since Shimei was above him, but figuratively he was taking the high road. Not a bad thing for us to remember when we are verbally attacked from people who want to hurt us: take the high road, don't stoop to their level, turn the other cheek, let the Lord work things out and vindicate you.

The final section takes us to the new administration setting itself up in Jerusalem:

III. Those Attacking David (16:15-23)

¹⁵ Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him.

¹⁶ And when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" ¹⁷ And Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And again,

² Jonathan Kirsch, *King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel* (New York: Ballantine, 2001), p. 236.

whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you.”²⁰ Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give your counsel. What shall we do?”²¹ 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.”²² 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.²³ 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.

Absalom has taken the unguarded Jerusalem without a fight! He then had to figure out his next moves, and he had two men in front of him who had worked for David: Hushai and Ahithophel. One of them (Hushai) we know is a double agent, still working for the old king, while the other (Ahithophel) had changed sides and supported the rebellion. Eugene Peterson has a great description of the second man: “Ahithophel betrayed David... because he thought the future of the kingdom was with Absalom. All the smart money was on Absalom, and Ahithophel was nothing if not smart. It turns out that at heart Ahithophel was an opportunist... When David was the best bet, he bet on David. Of *course* he served David faithfully and well all those years – David was the brightest star on the horizon. But the moment it appeared that the star was in eclipse, Ahithophel went for what looked like the next sure thing: good-looking, ambitious, charismatic Absalom.”³

His advice when Absalom asked what they should do now that they had taken over Jerusalem was to make a claim to David’s throne in a symbolic way that would send a clear message: Make your father’s concubines yours. This would fulfill the prophecy of Nathan back in chapter 12:11-12: “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. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.” Absalom violating his father’s concubines in public was the most obvious way to let everyone know without a doubt that he had overthrown his father. This was burning a bridge, there was no going back from this. In the midst of this overthrow of Jerusalem, “we are reminded that everything transpiring is rooted in David’s crimes.”⁴ Absalom was reenacting – and heightening – “David’s sin with Bathsheba, stealing everything from another man and sleeping with that man’s wife. Even the location is identical.”⁵ Come back next week to see if (and maybe how) David gets his throne back.

Conclusion

As we sit back and reflect on this passage, the first question you could be asking yourself is, “What would it look like if I was in David’s place? Do I have true friends who would be there for me when my life falls apart?” Have you cultivated those deep relationships, and do you have the quality friends who would drop everything and come right over, whether it’s in your living room, at your hospital bed, or at your arraignment hearing? One example among many that I could give: when Kath’s mom died suddenly back in 2010, we were living in Virginia. We were surrounded with love and care from our church family and lots of friends there. But the funeral was in Maine, where my in-laws spent the most time and had a church family. Would you believe that several members of our church in Virginia booked flights and flew up there to be there for the funeral to support us? Here at CenterPoint, we have those friends too – when Kath was out of the country taking our daughter on her graduation trip; one of those nights was my birthday. One of the families in the

³ Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), p. 200.

⁴ Chisholm, p. 256.

⁵ Heath Thomas & J.D. Greear, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel* (Nashville: Holman, 2016), p. 237.

church said, "Come spend your birthday evening with us; whatever you want to eat, whatever you want to do." I don't want to take away their crowns in heaven by naming them, but it was truly a kind gesture.

If you don't have those friends, it's time to make them because you need them when life beats you up. God gives us one another to support each other and give us the strength to keep going. You need Samwise Gangees in your life – he's the true hero of *Lord of the Rings*, who walked with Frodo every step to Mount Doom, encouraging him, defending him, and even carrying him when he had to. And the best way to make a friend like that is to be a friend like that. Are you willing to sacrifice your time, go out of your way when it's inconvenient, and be that friend that can be counted on in times of adversity? Be like the men we met today, Ittai and Hushai? There are a lot of unbelievers who are great friends. Our being conformed to the image of Jesus as new creation should spur in us a desire to love others deeply. "*We love because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). What better chance to model Jesus' love than to be there for someone when they are at their lowest and very few can be counted on? Romans 12:15 - "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*" Proverbs 17:17 - "*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.*"

This Scripture passage also points to something deeper than having good friendships. The question that it asks you and me is: when it's unpopular to side with God's anointed, will you desert Him or will you endure and stay loyal? Jesus is God's anointed, that's what Messiah and Christ both mean, the anointed one. He is the ultimate One who demands our loyalty whether it's popular or not. It may be easy to follow Jesus when you're surrounded by other Christians, when your family goes to church together, when your social circles support your faith. But we all get out in the world and hear that the Bible is full of lies, that Christianity is wrong and oppressive, that believing in Jesus as the only way to salvation is narrow and ignorant.

There's been a lot of talk recently about people who were in the church who have de-converted. Now, I'm not criticizing those who question their faith and step back to find answers that they've always taken for granted; all of us need to do that to ensure that our faith is real. But so many leave Christianity because it's unpopular or because the world offers too many temptations. That's always disheartening to hear, but it's not new; it's been around since the early church, when Paul mentioned people like Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10 – who was "*in love with this present world (and) has deserted me.*" Jesus' parable of the sower and the four kinds of soils warned that many who had the word of the Gospel spoken to them would hear it but it would not take root and they would fall away. God calls a people to Himself who will follow Jesus no matter the situation, no matter the cost. Your faith will be tested, your loyalty will be challenged, but God promises to walk through this life with you, being faithful to complete the good work that He began in you. And Revelation promises great rewards "*To the one who conquers/overcomes:*

- *I will grant to eat of the tree of life.*" (2:7)
- They "*will not be hurt by the second death*" (2:11)
- "*I will give authority over the nations*" (2:26)
- "*I will never blot his name out of the book of life*" (3:5)
- "*I will grant him to sit with me on my throne*" (3:21).

Are you willing to say to Jesus what Attai said to David? "*As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.*" That is a faith that God rewards.

Look back at verse 30 – "*But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads,*

and they went up, weeping as they went.” The Greater David, Jesus, also ascended the Mount of Olives, weeping. Once He wept for the city, Jerusalem, and its people. The other time was right before He was arrested, where He prayed for God’s strength to endure His coming death, and His sweat was like great drops of blood. David’s suffering and having to leave his throne powerfully foreshadows Jesus’ leaving His throne in heaven to live His life in exile here; in humility living life as a human being who endured all the sufferings of this life. On the Mount of Olives, David was surrounded by loyal friends and family, but Jesus would be abandoned by His friends, the disciples. And the ultimate suffering came after His night in the Mount of Olives, when He was arrested and dragged back into Jerusalem to be beaten, convicted of criminal charges, and handed a death sentence that would be carried out that very day.⁶ Whereas David was being punished for his own sins, Jesus was punished for our sins, nailed to a cross to die.⁷

What does that mean and how does it help us? Those of you who were part of the “Share Your Faith” seminar yesterday, help me out here: explain the gospel with our five fingers.⁸

Heaven/Eternal Life is a free gift, it is not earned or deserved.

Humanity/Man is a sinner and cannot save himself.

God is loving and merciful but also holy and just, and must punish sin.

Jesus Christ is both God and man. He died on the cross and rose from the grave to pay the penalty for our sin and purchase a place for us in heaven.

Saving faith is not mere head knowledge or temporary faith. It is trusting in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation.

Beloved, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (Acts 16:30) and *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”* (Hebrews 10:23). Amen.

Benediction

2 Peter 3:18 - *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”*

⁶ S.A. Fix and J. Robert Vannoy, *2 Samuel: A Commentary*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/2-samuel/>

⁷ Tim Chester, *2 Samuel For You* (Great Britain: The Good Book, 2017), p. 118.

⁸ <https://evangelismexplosion.org/the-gospel-hand-presentation/>