

17. The coward and the forgiven one

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During his years as prime minister of the Soviet Union in 1960s, Nikita Khrushchev denounced many of the policies and the things done by Joseph Stalin. Once, as he was criticizing Stalin in a public meeting, Khrushchev was interrupted by a shout from a heckler in the audience. "You were one of Stalin's colleagues. Why didn't you stop him?"

"Who said that?" roared Khrushchev. An agonizing silence followed as nobody in the room dared move a muscle. Then Khrushchev replied quietly, "Now you know why."

We all have been cowards one way or another. We didn't want to be the ones who stand tall during the time when the one we disagree is in power or in control. Some of us stop there. But some people hold grudge, bitterness and hatred toward that person and get to that person's face when he or she is down and out.

It is one thing to holding our words and actions back because we are scared, but it is completely another thing to kick sand in the fallen person's face. Actually, in my opinion that is true cowardliness.

A. A GENUINE LOW LIFE

2 Samuel 16:1-4 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. 2 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." 3 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.'" 4 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!"

You recall that Mephibosheth was Jonathan's crippled son. Because of David's great love for Jonathan, he cared for Mephibosheth. Ziba, a servant of Mephibosheth, met David with essential supplies at the mountain top. This was a generous and helpful gift from Ziba.

I don't believe about this story from Ziba for one moment. If you remember him at the beginning of the story about Mephibosheth in chapter 9, king David asked Ziba if there is anyone in the house of Saul whom he can show kindness for Jonathan his best friend's sake. Instead of answering to the king's question with a simple answer of the person's name, he added his own comment about the man's physical condition: "lame in his feet". When Mephibosheth was ushered into the throne of David, David made Ziba as the head servant of this man's household.

For Ziba, this is a great opportunity that he can be released him from the servant duty of that crippled man. So he made up a phony story and David bought it without checking into it.

This report from Ziba hurt David, because at a time of crisis like this the last thing you need to hear is that another one has turned against you.

B. A GENUINE MISERABLE SLIME

2 Samuel 16:5-8 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. 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 Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! 8 The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!"

Bahurim was near Jerusalem, east of the Mount of Olives. Shimei was a distant relative of the former king Saul, and he still resented David for taking over the dynasty of Saul. Shimei was about as offensive as a person could be. He wanted to destroy and shred any dignity or confidence that David had left. These were not simple insults or merely the words of someone with a foul mouth. Shimei was asking God to destroy David.

There are always people ready to rejoice when a person falls. I am sure you all remember how Philistine people in Gaza Street and Iraqi people cheered when 9/11 happened. Only the coward rejoices and strikes a man when he is down.

Shimei had this heart against David for a long time, but he could only show it when David was down and out.

If you noticed, Shimei kept himself a distance from David's bodyguards. It is like a little creature that pretends to be a dog. It yelps ferociously from a distance or behind a gate. But when you go near it, it runs away. That is what this genuine miserable slime Shimei is like.

A quick look at the outward appearance of things seemed to confirm Shimei's analysis. But Shimei was wrong. None of this came upon David because of what he did to Saul or Saul's family.

- Shimei was wrong because David actually treated Saul and his family with great love and graciousness.
- Shimei was wrong because David did not bring Saul and his family to ruin. Saul himself brought the family to ruin.

Not many offenses plunge deeper into our hearts than false accusations, particularly when they're hurled at us when we're vulnerable.

C. MERCY RATHER THAN PUNISHMENT

2 Samuel 16:9-14 Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" 10 But the king said, "(1) What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because (2) the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" 11 And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "(3) 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. 12 (4) 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." 13 And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust. 14 Now the king and all the people who were with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there.

In the ancient Middle East, a dead dog was something utterly contemptible.

Abishai has a heart after me. He wanted to silence this miserable man permanently. His sword would move so fast that Shimei wouldn't know what happened to his neck until he sneezes. I am sure that Abishai was not the only one. There were more than 600 body guards of David who would be more than happy to take their frustration out on Shimei.

However, David didn't try to shut up Shimei. He didn't close his ears to unpleasant or critical words. David was willing to hear what God might say to him through a cursing critic:

1) David let Shimei speak because he was not a bloodthirsty man. - v10a
Truthfully, if David was the kind of man Shimei said he was, Shimei would be dead.

2) David let Shimei speak because he saw the hand of God in every circumstance. - v10b

He knew that God was more than able to shut Shimei up. David didn't need to give the order.

3) David let Shimei speak because he put the "Shimei problem" in perspective. - v11

David knew that his real problem was Absalom, not Shimei and he did not lose this perspective.

4) David let Shimei speak because he knew that God's hand was on the future as well as the present. - v12

David knew that if he did what was right in the present moment, God would take care of the future.

Charles H. Spurgeon the prince of preachers of yesteryear said this about this situation: "David could take this fellow's head off and that in a moment, and yet he said, "Let him alone. Let him curse." And this makes a splendid example. If you can revenge yourself, DON'T. If you could do it as easily as open your hand, keep it shut. If one bitter word could end the argument, ask for grace to spare that bitter word."

David was not the only one who left his throne and submitted himself completely to his God. Jesus did the same thing. As a matter of fact, He did more. David was a mere man, but Jesus is God. He took the form of humanity to rescue the ones who reject Him.

Philippians 2:6-8 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

I've been reading a fine book by Gene Edwards, 'A tale of Three Kings'. Edwards put this words into the mouth of David: "The throne is not mine. Not to have, not to take, not to protect, and not to keep. The throne is the Lord's." This is the reason why David could refresh himself and others in the Lord. He held everything loosely and knew that God has His hands on everything.

D. HUSHAI THE NEW ADVISOR OF ABSALOM

2 Samuel 16:15-19 Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him. 16 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!" 17 So 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, but whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with him I will remain. 19 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."

In last chapter, we have learned that Hushai wanted to leave with David and support him. But David thought it was better to send Hushai back to Absalom, to both spy on Absalom and to give him bad advices.

The bad advice from Hushai to Absalom was thought necessary because Ahithophel was with Absalom. Ahithophel was famous for his wise counsel. And David wanted someone on the inside of Absalom's leadership who might make Ahithophel's counsel become worthless.

The name Ahithophel may mean "Brother of Folly." If so, it may have been a name given to him later on account of defection from David.

E. WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND

2 Samuel 16:20-23 Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give counsel as to what we should do." 21 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." 22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. 23 Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. So was all the advice of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

Just because a person was godly and have been used by God, that doesn't mean that he is godly permanently. From being ungodly to godly requires the Spirit of God. But going from godly to ungodly is in human nature and we don't have to do anything to make it happen.

In the ancient world, taking the king's concubines was not only an act of immorality. It was also an act of treason. By doing this unspeakable act of betrayal, Absalom is burning the bridge permanently, never to return.

Why did Ahithophel give such radical advice? Because it made sense from his own self-interest. Since he switched his alliance to Absalom, he didn't want David and Absalom to get back together.

This disgraceful act says a lot about Absalom, who actually did it. It also says a lot about Ahithophel, who must have had a strange sense of satisfaction of vengeance in seeing David's women violated in a similar way to how his granddaughter Bathsheba committed adultery with David.

The tent that Absalom pitched in the sight of all Israel was probably a bridal tent. Absalom made the people of Israel fully aware that he was engaging in sexual relations with his father's concubines.

Any advice that appeals to our fleshly desires is not from God. Amnon listened to Jonadab and raped his sister. Absalom listened to Ahithophel and had incestuous sex with his father's concubines.

Strangely, Absalom thought he could establish his kingdom directly through immorality. He was a clever and skilled politician, but ignorant about the ways of God.

This tragic event was a fulfillment of God's prophecy through prophet Nathan in 2 Sam 12:11.

2 Samuel 12:11 Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from 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.'

F. APPLICATIONS

1) When the one who once was against us is down and fallen, we have the greatest opportunity to show our God's mercy to that person.

Everything in our flesh will say, "Kick sand in her face. Drop a boulder on his head." But if we extend God's mercy and love to that person, we might be able to win him or her to our God.

2) Any advice that appeals to our fleshly desires is not from God.

Just because an advice comes from a godly person, it doesn't mean that it is what the Lord is speaking to us. Let's always test all things against the Word.