

Title: Civil War, Again  
Text: 2 Samuel 15.24-16.20  
Theme: Betrayal  
Series: 2 Samuel  
Prop Stmtnt: The instinct to survive is behind much betrayal.

Siblings fight and they are related to each other. Spouses fight and in many cases divorce and they at one time loved one another. So, what hope is there for a nation? Lincoln famously said, "United we stand, divided we fall." He got that from Jesus (Mark 3.24). In the history of the world, the "united we stand" is the exception and the "divided we fall" is the norm. But the division of a country or community invites attacks from the outside who try to take advantage of the fractures on the inside in order to gain power. The nation of Israel was made up of 12 states who were supposed to be held together by their worship of God and their obedience of his law. There were some brief moments of time when they actually did worship God and follow his law, but for the most part they worshiped other gods, which meant that the glue that held them together was gone. The sorry story of the book of Judges is full of accounts of being attacked from the outside and destroying one another from the inside. The instability and vulnerability were terrifying. People will do almost anything in order to have security. They will even want a king who takes their money in taxes, and their sons for his army. The story of 1 Samuel is how Israel got a king. But this king had issues and a leader's personal life always impacts his public life. Saul's disappointing reign ended in suicide and Israel was still vulnerable to the Philistines. But all eyes are now on David. He has the strengths of Saul and none of the weaknesses and his rise to power coincides with the rise of Israel into a dominant power in the Ancient Near East. But leaders can stumble and David's moral failure opens the door for his son Amnon to rape his half-sister, who is then murdered by her brother. David's failure to address any of this in a reasonable way sets the stage for another civil war. The first was between the rising house of David the falling house of Saul. This civil war is all in the house of David and civil wars are not very civil. David's son Absalom has declared that he is king and he is in Hebron, which is about 25 miles south of Jerusalem, which means that David does not have much time to respond. But a civil war demands that people take sides. And this account is full of the stories of people who had to figure out what side they were going to take and why. Families are broken, friendships are shattered, bonds are splintered. Who are you going to follow?

Read Text: (15.13-17)

### 1. Who are you going to follow?

On Saturday, June 24, Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the Wagner Paramilitary group in Russia announced a rebellion in Russia and took control of an airport and military facilities in southern Russia and then led a convoy to Moscow in order to bring about regime change. The convoy got to within 125 miles of Moscow before it ended. Imagine that you were a general in the Russian army that day. If Prigozhin gets to Moscow, you have to make a choice. Are you going to follow Putin or are you going to join Prigozhin? Neutrality is not an option and if you choose the wrong one, it could cost you your life, at the very least, your career.

Now, in a minute, we are going to see how this shakes out in our text because our text is all about the different people who had to make a choice. But stop and think about the dynamics for a minute. What makes a king, a king? What gives him authority and power? It is people. The people take power from themselves and give it to him in exchange for security and identity. Many people will give away almost anything in order to be secure. But the people who give you that power can take it away. All it takes is for enough people to gather together at Hebron and declare, Absalom is the king! And history gets changed. David is propped up by those people loyal to him, but if enough become like Ahithophel, then David's reign is over. History is a teacher that holding on to power is like trying to hold on to sand in your hand. So, a rebellion has broken out and this is the occasion where hearts and genuine loyalties are revealed.

For several generations, our culture was tolerant of and at times even supportive of the general ideas of Christianity. Those days are, for the most part, gone. A pastor friend of mine in a small town of rural S. Dakota was asking for wisdom on how to respond to a Drag Queen hour for children at the local library. We have watched how tolerance becomes acceptance and acceptance becomes agreement and agreement becomes support and support becomes expected and now demanded. On a number of cultural issues, you and I are being forced to say what side of the issue we are on. As hard as that may appear to be, it has a way of exposing who has been pretending to follow Christ and who is really in. Jesus said in Luke 11.23, *"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."* So, who are you going to support? Well, that depends...

## 2. It depends on who you love or trust or fear?

If you love yourself above all, then you have to figure out which way the wind is blowing and is it strong enough to carry the day? If you love and trust your leader more than you do yourself, then you will be loyal, no matter what. If you fear your leader and fear what he or she would do if you were disloyal, or you fear the leader of the rebellion and what he or she would do, then you are in the challenging position of trying to pick the winner and loser. But, in that case, there is no love and loyalty, only fear and survival. That is what many of us think of when we think of politics. We see so many examples of people using people to advance themselves or protect themselves. But before we make a list of the people in this account we have to remember one very critical point. God anointed David as King. David was not perfect, but he was anointed by God. To rebel against David, was to rebel against God. So, even if you believed that winds of power had changed and were now blowing in Absalom's favor, to stand against God is never going to work out.

### **The king's servants (14-15, 30)**

I take the reference to "the people" in v.30, to likely being the same as the king's servants. I tend to think that David has people in his staff who are loyal to him because they love him and they are genuinely grieved that this is happening. Are they risking their lives by going with him? They

may be. They also may risk their lives by staying behind. But, they are choosing to stay loyal and it seems because they love him.

### **Ittai the Gittite and his soldiers and families (18-22) (faithful)**

Ittai and his men are an incredible example of God's grace in this tragic situation. These are some of the most unlikely followers of David, and yet Ittai is the one whose loyalty is so clear and compelling. Once again, the OT sets the stage for the NT. The kingdom of God was never intended to be exclusively Israeli or Jewish. God told Abraham that by selecting him and his progeny, he would be blessing the entire world. Here in 2 Samuel 15 we have a preview of the book of Acts. God is going to open the door up to Gentiles who will love God just as much as the OT people of God did, and in many cases, even more!

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### **Abiathar (Jonathan – son), Zadok (Ahimaaz – son) and the Levites (24-29) (faithful)**

This is a fascinating account. On the one hand, Abiathar and Zadok and the Levites want nothing to do with Absalom and the rebellion. They know enough about the law of God and fear God enough to realize that what Absalom is doing is wrong. So, they are making a statement. They bring the Ark of the Covenant with them. They want to make it clear that God is with us. God is on our side and we can appreciate that. That had to be a great encouragement to David, but here, once again, David rises to the occasion. This is not what the Ark of the Covenant is to be used for. We don't take the ark in order to say that God is on our side. The Ark is not a good luck charm or magic force field that will keep us safe. Neither is it a weapon that we use to fight our enemies. God is God and we are to live in a posture of humble trust regularly offering our lives to him to be used as he sees fit. That is exactly what David says in vs.25-26. *"If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back...here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him."*

I was about 20 years old and I was praying and telling the Lord that my life was completely his. He could take whatever he wanted and use me however he wanted. I was serious, but I also realized that it was rather easy to pray that because I didn't have anything. I didn't have a girlfriend, a car, and had a couple of hundred dollars in a savings account. So, yea, to say, Lord to what seems good to you, just didn't feel like it had much risk to it. For David to pray this, he was taking his hands off of everything – and that was the kingdom. Of course, the truth is, God is God and we can't hold on to anything anyway.

### **Ahithophel (unfaithful)(31)**

We met Ahithophel last week. Absalom sent for him to come to Hebron, but now, David is told some of the worst news he could hear. (31) *"Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom."* Ahithophel and Absalom are two generations apart, but they are bound by a common resentment of David. Bathsheba is the granddaughter of Ahithophel and even though he is one of

David's closest and most trusted advisors, he has apparently never forgotten nor forgiven David. David realizes that if Absalom listens to the counsel of Ahithophel, then this will likely be the deciding factor for the success or failure of Absalom's coup. This is a man who always seems to know what to do. His defection is a terrible blow to David personally and a major victory for Absalom.

#### **Hushai the Archite (faithful) (32-37)**

We meet Hushai in v.32. He is another close advisor to David, but unlike Ahithophel, he is devastated by what has happened and comes to find David in order to join him. David tells Hushai to go to Jerusalem and pretend to be loyal to Absalom but, instead be a mole and let David know what Absalom plans to do sending word through Zadok and Abiathar who will let their boys know and they can get word to David. Praise God that most of us have had faithful people who have not abandoned us in our grief. But, that is not the entire story. Most of the time, there are agents of Satan who are looking to take advantage of a perceived weakness so that they can exploit it for themselves, or worse. Such is the case with the next two.

#### **Ziba servant of Mephibosheth (16.1-4) (appears to be faithful, but actually deceitful)**

We met Ziba in 2 Samuel 9. Ziba had been a servant of Saul's and he is the one who tells David about Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul. David then was looking for a way to honor any remaining relatives of Saul, which, is very unusual. Most of the time, when there is a regime change, the previous regime is wiped out, which is what looks like it will happen here. For many years now, Ziba has been Mephibosheth's servant, and Mephibosheth has been on David's payroll. Everything that we know about Mephibosheth was that he was grateful and loyal to David. But that now appears to not be the case. Ziba shows up with a lot of provisions for David, but there is no Mephibosheth. Notice the questions that David asks: Why have you brought these? and Where is your master's son? Ziba claims that Mephibosheth stayed back in Jerusalem because he believes that he will inherit the kingdom now. This is bizarre, but Ziba looks and sounds convincing and David believes him. This apparent betrayal on the part of Mephibosheth is another kick in the gut to David. He tells Ziba that everything that belonged to Mephibosheth is now his. Ziba has apparently gotten what he wanted and the scene is concluded with some flattery on the part of Ziba, who, as time will reveal is playing David.

#### **Shimei (Enemy) (16.5-13)**

When the authority of a leader is lost, or when his reputation and image are compromised, then it appears to give voice to those who have for a long time held deep-seated grievances or who are just evil people and relish in the failures of others. Such is the case with Shimei. Shimei was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a relative of Saul's. When Saul and his line was replaced by David, Shimei and his ilk lost their status. Even though David was wildly successful as king and elevated Israel beyond anyone could imagine, there were people like Shimei who resented him and hated the fact that David was so successful. Shimei is giddy with the opportunity to publicly

express the scorn that has been boiling for years in his heart. This guy is like Satan and there are people who are like this in this world and sadly, in your life. For whatever reason, they hate you and you know they hate you and there is nothing that you can do that will ever win them over. It is a hard grief that all of us have. They wait for ill to befall you and when it does, they delight in it and love to announce to others how they knew all along what a louse and hypocrite and failure you were. They love to accuse you of things that are not true but seem plausible to those who hate you, such as here: "The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul.... See your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood." Abishai can't stand it and wants to kill Shimei. David orders him to stand down. He feels the pain of the accusations and knows that there is some truth to it. Perhaps Shimei is an agent of the LORD who is adding to David's humility and complete surrender. It looks like David's soul is completely broken. He has no fight in him. His world has caved in and even though he is surrounded by some people who love him deeply, who are loyal to him and will fight for him to the death, David appears to have no fight in him. Look at verse 13. Shimei went along the hillside opposite of David and his men and threw stones and dirt and cursed him and David did nothing! Based on everything that we read, we would be right to wonder if this is it? Is this the end? V. 14 takes us to the end of the first day. David and his servants arrive at the Jordan. There, David refreshed himself. We do not know what is going to happen, but in the moment, we have to admit that it does not look good.

### 3. Where do you turn?

Andrew Peterson begins his song, "Is He worthy?" with the question: do you feel the world is broken? And yes, we do. And there are times when the reality of that brokenness presses deeper into our souls and this is one of those times. So, let's stop and acknowledge some things that we really need to keep in mind.

- We are broken people who live with broken people in a broken world, governed by sinners who cannot fix it.

Each of those phrases is hard to accept, even though easy to say. We are like David in the sense that there is plenty of failure in each of our lives. What if God put a couple of books in the Bible that told your story to the world? How would you like your secrets to be revealed? We are broken people are not only sinners, but, also like David, we are sinned against. There are those who delight in our demise and in some cases it is people that we have tried to help only to have it thrown into our face. We cannot fix ourselves. There is no government in this world that can make it right. Do not forget that David is one of the good kings. This is one of the best kings to ever rule and his reign is still got some serious flaws. That is the point that we have to learn. We need to be rescued. We need a Savior. In David's case, he threw himself upon the mercy of God believing that God could rescue him. (Psalm 3) In fact, there is a strange sense in which David finds God again while he is stripped away of everything else. His pen, echoing his heart comes alive in worship and delight in God. Like many years ago running for his life from Saul in the wilderness, David is running for his life again and discovers the presence and provision of God's grace in this dark night of the soul. So, in David we two things: We see his deep-seated faith that bubbles to the surface when he is under pressure. God used David's grief to be the occasion for

some of the most beloved Psalms to be written so that when you and I go through our deep valleys that we already have prayers written out for us to pray and songs composed for us to sing.

The second thing we see is a preview of Christ. David suffered for his sins. David was shamed, blamed and publicly reminded of his guilt. 1,000 years later, Christ would hear hundreds of Shimei's cursing him, blaming him, scoffing him and delighting in his torment and death. The difference was, David suffered for his sins, but Jesus suffered for ours. David suffered deeply, but his suffering was in some ways, just. He had contributed to this. But Christ suffered for us. He suffered in our place. Do not think that his suffering was just physical. He was treated as if he had committed each and every one of our sins. He was credited with our sin and our guilt. Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood.

Where do you turn when Satan tempts you with despair and tells you of all the guilt within? Turn to the one (the only one) who sealed your pardon with his blood and who rose again to prove that the payment was made in full and accepted forever! Trust in Him! Hallelujah, what a Savior!