

Title: The LORD had ordained
Text: 2 Samuel 16.15-17.23
Theme: The sovereignty of God
Series: 2 Samuel
Prop Stmt: God is sovereign even over insurrections.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. A person who has empathy is one who is able to put themselves in the shoes of another person and feel, see and understand what they feel, see and understand. We often think of empathy in relationship to compassion. A good counselor or therapist is one who is able to understand another person, gain their trust and then help them. That is a positive use of empathy. But there is another side. We have the capacity for moral outrage, and when someone is able to tap into that, then they can gain our trust and manipulate our sense of injustice for their purposes.

Imagine that the President asks Congress to declare war on Canada. We'd be dumbfounded. I mean, we don't care for the Blue Jays and we definitely don't like the Maple Leaves, but declare war? No! That's ridiculous!! What would happen to the Gordie Howe bridge, the Ambassador Bridge, the Detroit-Windsor tunnel, and most importantly of all, the annual freedom fireworks show? How could that ever happen? We would have to be convinced that there are atrocities being committed by Canada either against us, or against others to such a degree that we are left with no other choice than to invade. In order to make that happen, the President would have to control our sources of information. The President would have to start telling us about things that were going on that were so bad, and make us feel as if we had to go on a mission to make it right, but would have to stop our ability to hear any opposing view. Right now, invading Canada is preposterous because many of us have friends and family in Canada and if the President said that they were torturing little puppies, or not letting children play hockey, or whatever then you could call them and ask them about this. They could tell you that it is all a lie. But, if you don't listen to anyone but the President and the President has either cut you off from everyone else, or has convinced you that he is the only one you can trust (empathy) and the President is telling you things that get you would up, then the President may be able to get a declaration of war. But we (congress actually) would need to be convinced that it is worth it, and it is winnable.

That is exactly what Hitler did in Germany and what Putin has done in Russia. But it is not new at all. 3,000 years ago, Absalom led an insurrection against one of the most popular, successful and powerful kings ever to rule his people. How did he do that? How did he get a sizeable force to revolt against their king and be willing to not only overthrow him, but to kill him? After all, David expanded the kingdom, secured the borders, increased the wealth of the nation by extraordinary amounts, built cities and lifted the standard of living for the people beyond what many thought was even possible. How did Absalom convince people to rebel against David? Our text clues us in on that. The answer has a lot to do with how Satan convinced Adam and Eve to rebel against their King and kingdom. It also lets us know that in the end, this coup will not win.

Read text: 2 Samuel 16.15-17.14

V. 14 is the point of this text. If the LORD ordained to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, then the counsel of Ahithophel is going to be defeated. However, God uses our faith-driven obedience as means to carry out his Sovereign plan.

For example, David prayed for the counsel of Ahithophel to be turned into foolishness (15.31). David strategized to counteract Ahithophel's influence by sending Hushai back to Jerusalem. Now, in the moment, David did not know what God had determined to do. He said so, back in 15.25. (read) He also knew that God was in this in some way. (16.10) Again we are reminded:

- 1) God has a plan.
- 2) God will carry out his plan.
- 3) We need to do what is right as we seek to discern what he is doing.

Explain faith-driven obedience. We believe in God (faith). We believe the right things about God (faith). We believe that He is good and great. He has a plan and is sovereign over all things. He is accomplishing his sovereign and good plan through the free choices of man. Man is responsible for his choices. Man will face the consequences of his choices, but man's choices, as free as they are to man accomplish the sovereign plan of God.

Proverbs 14.12 *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."*

1. What are the ways that seem right to man?

I am going to treat these a bit out of order so you see the connection between these themes.

A. **The way of resentment.** (16.20-23)

Ahithophel seized his moment. Absalom asked him what to do and Ahithophel's response was specific and shocking. Rape your father's concubines. The reason given was because this will make it clear to your followers that there is no possibility of peace between you and your dad. If people follow you and you and your dad settle this, those who follow you will be dead. They need to know that you are all in and this will do it. That is true. But there is more to this and the details bear it out. They pitched a tent on the roof of the palace. Oh, that sounds familiar. This is where David was when he saw Bathsheba (granddaughter of Ahithophel). There is no way this is coincidental. This is Ahithophel's resentment boiling over. You did this to my family; I am going to do this 10x worse to yours. You did it in private, now this is going to be public. You embarrassed me, I am going to shame you in front of the nation and the world. But what really convinces me that Ahithophel is so full of resentment is what he says in 17.2. He wants to kill the king, personally. *"I will strike down only the king."* That is chilling. It is also telling. We will deal with this more in a minute, Meanwhile,

Absalom is supposedly getting revenge for his sister's rape. This evil done to her by Amnon is what connected us (and others) to him in the first place. We felt his rage (empathy). We identified with his desire to restore her honor (supposedly). We were frustrated with David's failure to respond decisively. Now, we realize that this isn't about her honor, this is about power. If Absalom was truly outraged over the evil of rape done to a member of his own family, he would have been disgusted and outraged over this counsel from Ahithophel. Instead, he shows no hesitation. This appeals to him. This is how Absalom displays his power. This is how Absalom uses his power. This is how Absalom treats those who are under his authority. This is the first publicly recorded act of Absalom. What kind of a king do you think he is going to be? This is another sad and sordid example of our world's view of power and experience with power. We give power to leaders to protect us and they take that power, but who is going to protect us from them? What protection did these women have? How was the king taking care of them? How was this king of the people of God displaying the character of God, and displaying the uniqueness of Israel to the world? Absalom was as debased as any another. And Ahithophel fed the monster because Ahithophel was blinded by his own resentment.

V.23 is the narrator's commentary. Ahithophel always seemed to know exactly what to do, which is why David was so concerned about Ahithophel advising Absalom. Now we see why Hushai's influence was so critical. If Ahithophel could tap into revenge, Hushai could tap into Absalom's inflated view of himself.

B. The way of pride. (16.15-19; 17.5-14)

When you first read Hushai's greeting, you wince. You wince for Hushai. How could he pull this off? But, when you look at it carefully, you see just how brilliant this is. This is what a clever lawyer would come up with. He does not say, "Long live King Absalom", he says, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" Which Absalom assumed meant himself, when in reality Hushai was working for the real king – David and wanted him to live long. Absalom was initially concerned that Hushai was a mere opportunist (like himself) so he questioned him. "Is this your loyalty to your friend?" Well, Absalom is this your loyalty to your dad? But the truth is, this was Hushai's loyalty to his friend. "Why did you not go with your friend?" The truth is, Hushai had already gone to be with David and if Absalom found that out, Hushai would be executed. So, Hushai answers cleverly and yet truthfully. "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." Well, whom had the LORD chosen? It was David. But Absalom assumed this meant himself. But Hushai was actually being loyal to David by being there and pretending to be loyal to Absalom. Then Hushai said, "whom should I serve?" ... "As I have served your father, so I will serve you." That is exactly what David told Hushai to say (15.34).

This is really insightful. Absalom had spent 4 years telling people what they wanted to hear in order to manipulate them for himself. He played them. And guess what? Hushai is playing him. He used flattery on others because he was vulnerable to it. And it worked. Hushai was part of the coup (at least it seemed that way).

That sets us up for what happens next. Absalom wants to know what their next step should be. Ahithophel is decisive and insightful. Pounce immediately! (17.1-4) David is broken. He is on the run. He has no fight in him. And he is absolutely right. But notice how many times Ahithophel says “Let me” and “I will”. There seems to be a lot of bravado here. The fact that Ahithophel says to pick 12,000 men lets you know that this is a major coup. Hushai knows that if Ahithophel does this, that this will be disastrous. So, he waits his turn. His counsel appeals to Absalom’s pride and sense of power and largeness. Ahithophel doesn’t want to risk Absalom’s life, so his plan is that he leads the men. This is the opening that Hushai is able to exploit. He doesn’t say it, but he doesn’t have to. If Ahithophel leads the men, Ahithophel gets the glory. So, in an appeal to Absalom’s vanity Hushai basically says that, if you are going to do this, do it right. Do it big. Do it in such a way that they will be talking about this for years. You want to do this in such a way that you are guaranteed to be successful. You need to gather an army “as the sand by the sea for multitude, and that **you** go to battle in person.” (v. 11) You know that in that moment, the music starts playing in Absalom’s head as he envisions himself mounted in front of tens of thousands of soldiers, delivering the speech of his life. Then, thrusting his sword into the air, he hears the roar of unity, commitment, determination and devotion and then with the wind in his hair, he sees himself riding in glory to victory. Oh yea! That’s the plan. Hushai sold it because Absalom was willing, too willing to buy it. But there was a deeper reason.

Hushai has, for the moment, saved the day. But the real story is God. *“The LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring harm upon Absalom.”* In terms of what would work, Ahithophel was right and Hushai was wrong. In terms of what was best, God used Hushai who played Absalom at his own game.

Have you ever been played? Of course, you have! We all have. This week, the Attorney General’s office arrested several people who were part of a scam that bilked about \$11 million from people, mostly elderly people in Western Michigan using a variety of means. We hate that. But the worst scam that you could ever be deceived by is the scam of the evil one who wants to convince you to trust yourself instead of trusting in God. Satan will play you right into hell if he can, and he is way smarter and more convincing than any scammer. What are the lies that you are most vulnerable to?

- I don’t need God
- I don’t need others
- My worth is determined by what others think of me
- My worth is determined by what I own
- My value is determined by being in a relationship
- My identity is determined by being young, attractive, healthy, sophisticated and envied

All of those are lies and they will betray you. One of the reasons why we dare not lean on our own understanding but in all our ways acknowledge God and his ways. God will not scam you. God will not betray you. God will never make you a promise that he won’t keep. He not only has a heart of love for you, but he cannot be stopped.

2. Man's ways cannot stop God's plan.

In the moment it looks like the momentum is all on Absalom's side and that anyone who is loyal to the real king is in danger. The truth is, you are never in actual danger when you are loyal to the real King. You not only have God, but....

A. **God always has his people.**

The writer of 2 Samuel has the benefit of hindsight from God's perspective. He tells us in v.14 that the LORD had ordained to defeat the council of Ahithophel because the LORD would not let Absalom succeed. We know that now, but in the moment, no one knew that. So, now, we can look back and know that all these moments of intense drama were in reality the providences of God carrying out the plan of God. But, again, Hushai does not know that David is going to be rescued. In the moment he knows that David and his much smaller force are vulnerable (very vulnerable) to Absalom and that he has no time to lose. He gets word to Zadok and Abiathar whose responsibilities at the tabernacle would mean that they are close to the palace. This is like a high stakes chase scene in a spy thriller. In a coup no one really knows who they can trust, so everyone is on the lookout and Absalom had to have had a network of people who were reporting to him anything that looked suspicious. Zadok and Abiathar get word to a servant girl who was supposed to tell Jonathan and Ahimaaz, but they were spotted which threw a curve ball into the plan. But, no worries. God not only has his people; God is in the details.

B. **God is in the details.**

Jonathan and Ahimaaz are running for their lives and come to house in Bahurim, where they are hidden in well. They narrowly escaped capture, but were able to accomplish their mission and get word to David. David and his force were able to cross the Jordan and rest and be refreshed, at least for a moment. They got away. The chapter ends with food coming to them from several sources, one in particular that seemed surprising to us, which only underscores the point that...

C. **God takes care of his own.**

God's ways are not man's ways. God's ways are not always obvious, nor are they understood. But God's ways will not be stopped. We do not always see them before they happen but we can praise God for his faithfulness and amazing providences after they do. God takes care of his own and if you are his own, he is and will take care of you. You really will be okay. In fact, more than okay, forever. You see...

3. It is all part of a bigger plan. (17.23)

Ahithophel knew that Absalom missed his moment. He knew that this coup was now doomed to fail. He gave it his best shot. All that he had helped to do was now a failure. He knew that he

had picked the wrong side. There was nothing left for him to do, then take his own life. If he didn't, it would either be done to him or he couldn't bear the shame of facing his friend and king that he had betrayed. He went home, got his affairs in order, then hung himself.

A. The obvious connection

Many of you already see it now, don't you. Remember the Psalm 41 text we prayed together at the beginning of the service? Remember verse 9? *"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."* This is a Psalm of David and this statement in v.9 which may have been written with Ahithophel in view, was quoted by Jesus and applied to Judas Iscariot. Like Ahithophel, Judas betrayed the king and like Ahithophel he realized, too late that this did not turn out like he thought and like Ahithophel he hung himself. That is fascinating. And we can all see another example of just how interwoven the Bible is on so many levels of detail. But we need to see more because we need to take something else to heart.

B. The needful connection

What made Ahithophel so resentful of David? Well, it had to do with David's sin with his granddaughter, Bathsheba, right? Yes, but didn't David repent? Yes. Was David forgiven? Yes. David may have been forgiven by God, but he was not forgiven by Ahithophel. Ahithophel failed to appreciate the grace that God had given to David and he failed to trust the gracious God that poured out that grace. Fast forward 1,000 years and what triggered Judas Iscariot? He failed to appreciate the grace and love that Christ had poured out on Mary and her loving response of anointing the feet of Christ with costly perfume and he failed to trust our gracious Christ who received that love with joy. In both cases, Ahithophel and Judas believed that their sense of justice was more righteous than God.

When our sense of justice is violated, we feel like someone needs to pay. Someone needs to die. He has and he did. And he did it for you and for others. If you really believe that this is true for you, then you will believe that this is true for others as well.