

Message #33

Kurt Hedlund

Life of David

8/30/2020

DAVID AND DEALING WITH DISUNITY

2 SAMUEL 19:8-43

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

This week the Republicans had their national convention. You may have heard that they had a little bit of criticism of Joe Biden and the Democrats. Their warning was that the world as we know it will come to an end if the Democrats are put into power. The week before the Democrats had their national convention. You may have heard that they had a little bit of criticism of President Trump and the Republicans. Their warning was that if President Trump is given four more years in office the world as we know it will come to an end.

Also this week my home state of Wisconsin was in the news with the police shooting of a black man in the back in the town of Kenosha. This again brought the issue of police brutality to the forefront and the issue of rioting which followed quickly afterward.

Also this week Nevada schools opened, sort of, as virtual learning in the public school system resumed. Some parents are accepting of this arrangement. Some parents, especially those with special needs kids, are very unhappy about it. We were in California a week ago. The governor there has mandated that all churches be shut down for indoor meetings. Some Christians are accepting of that. Some pastors are defying that order, with the result that there are criminal complaints and lawsuits flying around. Christians are divided in their opinions.

There is a fair amount of division in our nation right now. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the people of God. Jesus told his followers (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 5:9) in Matthew #5 v. 9, **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”** Such is the calling we have been given. How is that supposed to work out for us in the culture in which we find ourselves? We are going to examine the passage before us this morning to see what insights the Lord might have for us in figuring out how we should deal with disunity in the world around us.

We have seen in our sermon series that King David was facing a fair amount of division both in his family and in his country. Much of the problem was traceable to his own bad behavior. God forgave David for

his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah, but proclaimed that there would be negative consequences that would come from them. We have seen that David's oldest son raped his half-sister. The sister's brother Absalom killed the rapist, which made him next in line to the throne.

Absalom did not want to wait until his dad was dead or gave up his position. So he staged a coup. This further divided the royal family and the country. David won the conflict. His nephew and chief general Joab killed Absalom, defying the order of the king to deal gently with his son. David's wrong focus on the loss of his son to the neglect of the forces loyal to him and the sacrifices which they made threatened to unravel the benefits of this victory. Joab confronted David and managed to get him to change his focus. We pick up the story from there in 2 Samuel #19, beginning at v. 8. (This is p. 270 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs.)

I.

In vv 8-15 and 40-43 we are going to consider THE SETTING FOR DISUNITY. (I. THE SETTING FOR DISUNITY) Beginning with the last sentence of v. 8 and continuing through v. 10 we read, **“Now Israel had fled every man to his own home. And all the people were arguing throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, ‘The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?’”**

(DAVID 20E MAP) Most of the twelve tribes living on the west side of the Jordan River had sided with Absalom in his revolt against his father. David had fled to Mahanaim on the east side of the Jordan River. With the death of Absalom the opposition to David collapsed. These former opponents are now uncertain about how to proceed. Will David seek to hurt them because of what they did? The impression that I get is that David has popular support among the people, and they pressure their leaders, who were more directly involved with Absalom, to bring the king back.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament adds these words to the end of v. 10: **“And the word of all Israel came to the king.”** So perhaps this news prompts David to make the move that he does in v. 11: **“And King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests: ‘Say to the elders of Judah, ‘Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house, when the word of all Israel has come to the king?’”**

It is clear that David does not immediately return to Jerusalem after his victory. He wants conditions to be right before he goes back to Jerusalem. He wants there to be a general acceptance of his kingship. Judah appears to be slow to respond. (DAVID 20F) Judah in the south was the tribe of both David and Absalom. While most of Israel seems to have sided with Absalom, the roots of the rebellion lay within the tribe of Judah and the family of David.

Zadok and Abiathar were the chief priests of the nation. They had sided with David in this recent conflict. David now wants their help in getting the tribe of Judah back on board with his leadership. Many of them had sided with Absalom against his father. It is understandable that they may have had fear of retribution from the king, but David's message through the priests seems to promote reconciliation. David wants a unified nation.

Verse 12 describes the message that David sent along: **"You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?"** That sounds positive. That sounds conciliatory. It appears that the king has a forgiving attitude.

The king continues in v. 13, **"And say to Amasa, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me and more also, if you are not commander of my army from now on in place of Joab.'"** Amasa was the chief general under Absalom and the cousin of General Joab. So he is also part of the extended family of David. David appears to be dumping Joab in favor of Amasa. There are probably two reasons for this. One is that taking on Amasa as the new chief general will help bring the troops who had fought against David's forces back into the same army. If you can co-opt someone who was formerly your enemy and bring them onto your team, unity may be preserved. Then also David was ticked off at Joab. Once again his nephew had defied his orders in killing someone whom David did not want dead. But how is this going to go over with Joab and the troops loyal to him? What role, if any, David envisions for Joab is unclear.

Verse 14: **"And he swayed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, 'Return, both you and all your servants.'"** David's work behind the scenes appears to bear fruit. His conciliatory attitude toward those who had opposed him helps to unify his own tribe.

Verse 15: **"So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan."** (DAVID 20G GILGAL) Gilgal was on the west side of the Jordan River. Now David and his forces move from their camp in Mahanaim on the east side of the Jordan to come down to the river.

Things with David's tribe of Judah appear to be coming together. But what will be the effect upon the other tribes? Favoring his own tribe may cause jealousy with the other tribes. Initially it was people from these other tribes who called for David to be brought back home.

So we will skip down to v. 40 to see how things work out. According to v. 40, **"The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. All the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel, brought the king on his way."** We will come back to Chimham in a little bit. Notice here that that half of the people of Israel also participate in this bringing of David and his forces back across the Jordan. My guess is that these Israelites were remnants of the troops who had recently fought against David. But then we encounter a problem. (PROJECTOR OFF)

According to v 41, **"Then all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, 'Why have our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, and all David's men with him?'"** I suspect that these are some of the leaders of the other tribes of Israel who see that the people of Judah are taking a lead in this return of David. They are jealous. David is in a tough spot. The rebellion has happened within his own tribe and his own family. He needs to get the people of Judah together to get his royal administration back in order. But his conciliatory dealing with them has resulted in jealousy from the leaders of the other tribes.

We read in v. 42, **"All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, 'Because the king is our close relative. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?'"** You northerners should expect that we would have preferential treatment, given that David is from our tribe. At the same time, we have not been given any freebies. Our taxes and government benefits are not any different than yours.

Verse 43: **"And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, 'We have ten shares in the king, and in David also we have more than you. Why then did you despise us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?' But the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel."** The ten tribes of Israel should count more toward the king than the one tribe of Judah. By this time the tribe of Simeon has been absorbed into the larger tribe of Judah.

Thus David is still faced with a problem of disunity in his country. David's earlier sin produced a divided royal family which has resulted in a divided kingdom. This is also a foretaste of the divided kingdom

which will develop in the generation of his grandchildren. Despite this continuing disunity, there are lessons that we can learn from David's efforts to restore unity to his kingdom. We are going to go back to our passage and notice how he treated three individuals.

II.

In vv. 16-23 we are going to look at DAVID AND DEALING WITH CRITICS. (PROJECTOR ON--- DAVID AND DEALING WITH CRITICS) In v. 16 we are told, **“And Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, from Bahurim, hurried to come down with the men of Judah to meet King David.”**

We were introduced to Shimei back in #16 when David was fleeing Jerusalem from Absalom. If you will turn back to #16, you will notice what happened with him beginning in v. 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. 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. And Shimei said as he cursed, ‘Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! 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.’”**

This relative of Saul was blaming David for the death of Saul and his sons. He was cursing the king appointed by the Lord and throwing rocks at him. Now this Benjaminite and relative of Saul has joined with people from Judah to meet King David. Verse 16 in our text says that Shimei is hurrying to meet David. It is as if he is competing with others to be the first to welcome him back to Jerusalem.

Verse 17 in our text adds, **“And with him were a thousand men from Benjamin. And Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and his twenty servants, rushed down to the Jordan before the king...”** Shimei also has with him an additional thousand men from Saul's tribe. These include Ziba and his clan, the official under Saul who had been tasked to manage the estate of Saul for Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son. Back in in #16 Ziba brought much needed supplies to David when he was fleeing from Jerusalem. Ziba claimed that Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul, stayed behind in Jerusalem because he was hoping to become king. David at that time promised all of the estate of Mephibosheth to Ziba.

Verse 18: **“... and they crossed the ford to bring over the king's household and to do his pleasure. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan...”** This is a total change of attitude in Shimei toward David.

According to vv. 19 & 20, **“...and [Shimei] said to the king, ‘Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. Do not let the king take it to heart. For your servant knows that I have sinned. Therefore, behold, I have come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king.’”** Shimei is from the tribe of Benjamin. Joseph’s two sons were Ephraim and Manasseh. They became leaders of two of Israel’s tribes. These two tribes became dominant in the northern part of Israel. So Shimei is in effect saying that he has come as first of all of the non-Judah tribes of Israel to welcome the king.

What is David to do with Shimei? He seems to be sincere in his confession of wrongdoing. He appears to have a significant group of people with him. In order to return to Jerusalem David will have to pass through the territory of Shimei’s tribe of Benjamin, and he will even go through Shimei’s hometown of Bahurim. So is it more important to exercise justice or mercy?

Verse 21: **“Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, ‘Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?’”** Abishai is a military leader and the brother of General Joab. He has been known to have a quick trigger finger. Earlier there were a couple of occasions where he offered to kill King Saul when he had the opportunity. Abishai is arguing for justice.

According to vv. 22 & 23, **“But David said, ‘What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?’ And the king said to Shimei, ‘You shall not die.’ And the king gave him his oath.”** The Hebrew word for “adversary” is *satan*, from which we get our English word “Satan.” This word comes to be used of the devil. Here David puts both Abishai and his brother Joab in this category of adversary.

David, who is very aware of the mercy that God has shown him in regard to his sins, chooses to show mercy toward Shimei. It seems to be the right thing to do. It is the example of Jesus in the New Testament. This mercy also has political benefits. Shimei seems to represent a significant northern contingent. David is trying to bring his country together. He is trying to heal the divisions in the land. Forgiveness is usually necessary to preserve unity in a family or a business or a church or in a country.

The most common New Testament word for “forgiveness” means literally “to let it go.” That is what is involved in forgiveness. It is letting the wrongdoing go. That does not necessarily mean that we have to trust the offender. Later we will see that David gives his son Solomon a warning about Shimei. (1 KINGS 2:8) In 1 Kings #2 vv. 8 & 9 he says, **“And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ (1 KINGS 2:9) Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.”**

Nevertheless, by David’s gracious treatment of Shimei, and by his forgiveness, he has helped to promote unity and reconciliation. In 1960, under court order, six-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first black student to attend a formerly all-white elementary school in New Orleans. She was accompanied by four federal marshals. Initially they had to pass through a gauntlet of protestors who shouted and cursed and threw things at them. All of the teachers at the school except one quit. Initially all of the other parents pulled their children out of the school.

But Ruby Bridges was an amazing child. She met regularly with a psychiatrist by the name of Robert Coles. She told him that she prayed for herself, that she would be strong and unafraid. She also prayed for her enemies that God would forgive them. She told the psychiatrist, **“Jesus prayed that on the cross. Forgive them, because they don’t know what they’re doing.”** The psychiatrist was blown away by her attitude.

That winsome spirit in the face of terrible persecution and opposition eventually won over people around her. Gradually parents began to send their kids back to the school. Gradually teachers began to return. Coles never expected such a gracious love for enemies to be lived out by a little girl from a supposedly “culturally deprived” family. (Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor*, p. 98) Such is the spirit that is needed in our often fractured society.

III.

In vv. 24-30 we encounter DAVID AND DEALING WITH CONFUSION. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. DAVID AND DEALING...) Stressful times and situations that produce division often are accompanied by confusion. Such are the circumstances involving the next character whom David encounters.

We read in v. 24, **“And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. He had neither taken care of his feet nor trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in safety.”** Whom our author describes as the son of Saul would be described by us as the grandson of Saul. For Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the son of David. But the Hebrew Bible uses the term “son” to refer to any male descendant of another person. Jesus, for example, is often referred to in the New Testament as the Son of David.

David had promised his good friend Jonathan that he would watch out for Jonathan’s descendants. Mephibosheth was lame in both of his feet. When David discovered that he was alive, he gave all of King Saul’s estate to him and put Ziba in charge of managing it. He also brought Mephibosheth to Jerusalem and had him eat at the king’s table. As David began his flight from Jerusalem, Ziba showed up and claimed that Mephibosheth was dissing the king and was hoping that he might become king. Without studying out the situation any further, David pronounced that all of Saul’s estate would go to Ziba and his family.

Now we discover that Mephibosheth has the appearance of a mourner. His toenails are untrimmed, his beard has become scraggly, and his clothes are unwashed. This is hardly the appearance of one who supposedly thinks that he is going to become king. To show this kind of respect for David while remaining in Jerusalem was risky for Mephibosheth. But it gives evidence that he truly was a supporter of David.

According to vv. 25-28, **“And when he came to Jerusalem to meet the king, the king said to him, ‘Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?’ He answered, ‘My lord, O king, my servant deceived me, for your servant said to him, “I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go with the king.” For your servant is lame. He has slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you. For all my father’s house were but men doomed to death before my lord the king, but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to cry to the king?’”**

Mephibosheth seems to be sincere, and his story strikes most students of the Bible as believable. He makes no selfish requests about himself. He is more interested in maintaining a relationship with the king than in gaining any personal benefit.

In fact, Mephibosheth is a picture of the genuine believer. His lameness shows that he has little in himself to offer. Yet by the gracious choice and calling of the king, he has been placed at the king's table. Mephibosheth demonstrates faith in David by his mourning, which shows that he has hope for the king's return. Is that not the kind of hope that we Christians are to have, in regard to the return of King Jesus, the Son of David?

Verses 29 & 30: **“And the king said to him, ‘Why speak any more of your affairs? I have decided: you and Ziba shall divide the land.’ And Mephibosheth said to the king, ‘Oh, let him take it all, since my lord the king has come safely home.’”** David only partially retracts his previous decision. It is unclear what he was thinking. It would seem that his earlier decision was hasty and unwise. Perhaps David sees a need not to reject the clan of Ziba, who represents a significant faction which has been helpful to David.

In dealing with Shimei David provided clemency. In dealing with Mephibosheth and Ziba, David goes with expediency. Yet Mephibosheth's interest is seemingly only in pleasing the king. In confusing times when division abounds, that needs to be our focus as well. We need to focus on pleasing the God who is there.

IV.

In vv. 31-39 we come to **DAVID AND DEALING WITH A MATURE SUPPORTER**. (IV. DAVID AND DEALING WITH A MATURE SUPPORTER) Verse 31 tells us: **“Now Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim, and he went on with the king to the Jordan, to escort him over the Jordan.”**

Barzillai was from Rogelim (DAVID 19 FLIGHT), which was on the east side of the Jordan River, north of the city of Mahanaim where David had set up his camp in exile.

Verse 32: **“Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man.”** Barzillai had shown up at Mahanaim when David first arrived there and supplied him and his forces with much needed supplies. (PROJECTOR OFF) He was a wealthy and generous man. The author calls him “very great.” He took a definite stand for the king in the midst of a time of disunity and confusion. He could have stayed home and claimed that he was too old to get involved. His stand could have cost him everything if David had lost.

In such times of confusion and division the godly often have to decide what is right. Forgiveness may be necessary. But it also may be necessary to take a stand for what is right. Greatness for Barzillai meant showing up and siding with God's anointed king and being generous to his people.

According to vv. 33-35, **“And the king said to Barzillai, ‘Come over with me, and I will provide for you with me in Jerusalem.’ But Barzillai said to the king, ‘How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day eighty years old. Can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? Your servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king. Why should the king repay me with such a reward? ”**

It is a kind offer from David, but Barzillai has no need of royal provision. He also could not enjoy all that David has to offer. Older people generally want to be around familiar surroundings. In the Ancient Near East they were especially concerned about being buried in their ancestral home.

Thus Barzillai says in vv. 37 & 38, **“Please let your servant return, that I may die in my own city near the grave of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham. Let him go over with my lord the king, and do for him whatever seems good to you.’ And the king answered, ‘Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do for him whatever seems good to you, and all that you desire of me I will do for you.”**

Chimham was probably a son of Barzillai. David later seems to make reference to him in giving instructions to his son Solomon. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 KINGS 2:7) In 1 Kings #2 v. 7 he says, **“But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother.”** The sons of Barzillai might include Chimham and his descendants.

David was apparently faithful to his promise. For centuries later the prophet Jeremiah makes reference to the clan of Chimham. In Jeremiah #41 v. 17 (JEREMIAH 41:17) the prophet says of a group of Jewish refugees: **“And they went and stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt.”** “Geruth Chimham” means “lodging place of Chimham.” The name suggests that the descendants of Chimham occupied a town near Bethlehem.

Verse 39: **“Then all the people went over the Jordan, and the king went over. And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own home. (PROJECTOR OFF) The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. All the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel, brought the king on his way.”**

Such is the model behavior of a godly, older man. Unlike Shimei, he has no sin to confess. Unlike Mephibosheth, he has no confusion to clear up. He also has no favor to ask. He is simply a blessing to the good people around him. He is the kind of supporter that we want to have around in times of disunity. He is the kind of person we should strive to be in times of difficulty.

In Proverbs #11 vv. 24-24 (PROJECTOR ON--- PROVERBS 11:24-25) the author writes, **“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.”** Such is the kind of man who Barzillai was. He was the one who brought blessing.

We live in times of division. One of those causes of division has to do with whether schools should be open in this time of coronavirus pandemic. The authorities have determined that our kids should be taught only through virtual learning. This has created a hardship for working parents and single parents. Fortunately we have been able to have some constructive role in making a positive contribution to the situation. We have assisted Christ Lutheran Church which has taken a lead in establishing a homeschool co-op in Emmaus Hall. We appreciate all of your support in making this happen. It is OK to have opinions about what should be done in times of division, whether it is closing down the economy or opening it up, whether it is wearing face masks or not wearing face masks. But is much better to become involved in some kind of constructive action to help make a difference. May we continue to know how, and be motivated to, make a positive difference.