

SERMON: Life of David (14): Big enough to forgive - 2 Samuel 16:5-14

This morning is the 14th instalment of our life of David sermon series. For 14 weeks we've been exploring the Old Testament books of 1st and 2nd Samuel. Here's a bit of a recap and some context before we get to today's passage.

First, when it comes to reading 1st and 2nd Samuel, it's possible to read in such a way...

- ...that idolises David and Israel
- ...that turns a blind eye to their misdemeanours
- ...that justifies their awful actions
- ...that depicts David and Israel as faultless instruments carrying out God's good purposes
- ...that finds fault only in those Philistines, that evil, those enemies out there

But what we find as we read the books of Samuel is that the Bible critiques...

- ...not just 'their' social and political systems but ours.
- ...not just 'their' destructive tribalism but ours.
- ...not just 'their' dysfunctional family dynamics but ours.
- ...not just what's wrong in 'their' hearts but what's wrong in ours.

What we find in reading 1st and 2nd Samuel and in the life of David, is that even the best of the best of us humans are severely flawed and corrupted by our sinful motives.

God in and through 1st and 2nd Samuel and the Bible, acknowledges that we are all sinners *and* sufferers and how we have been treated and sinned against matters.

God knows not just what we do but *why* we do the things we do, and because God know the motives of our heart he is able to judge accordingly.

We also find in and through 1st and 2nd Samuel and the Bible that as flawed as we are, in God's holy hands, flawed instruments can be used for God's good and redemptive purposes and can even be redeemed in the process. God is able to draw straight lines with crooked sticks and broken ones.

What we find in reading Samuel and in the life of David is that the real hero, the real saviour, the perfect example, the only one to be worshipped is... Jesus. He is the greater and truer King that David and every earthly leader leaves us longing for.

When David, when we, when God's people are turned to God, like mirrors, we reflect something of the love and goodness of God. When we are turned away from God, turned in on ourselves, at our worst, Light of the World Jesus graciously intervenes, stepping down into darkness.

As we come to 2 Samuel chapter 16, things are spiralling out of control for David, his family and for the nation. It is literally a bloody, awful mess. There is fallout of epic proportion and much of it is because of David and sinful choices he has made and long-established patterns of sinful behaviour.

At this point in David's life, even though he has been warned against having multiple wives, he has 8 named wives and a series of unnamed wives and concubines. David has 19 named sons, one named daughter Tamar, and unnamed sons and daughters. It's possible to skip over this or conclude from the other biblical historical narratives that the Bible condones polygamy and God doesn't seem to mind.

But the Bible doesn't promote polygamy and God does mind. This is worth re-iterating, the Bible it turns out, warns against polygamy time and time again by detailing the pain and strife, alienation, relational disintegration and generational fallout story after story after story. The Bible calls to mind the women and children who are affected. We see the tragic consequences of this first, in Genesis chapter 4 with Lamech. Lamech is the first man recorded to take more than one wife. We see it with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We see it with David and even worse with Solomon.

Such is God's respect for us humans and our right to decide things for ourselves, there are times He gives his people (on an individual and national level) what they want. God does so, so that we will see and feel the natural consequences of going our own way rather than His and learn the error of our ways. As a loving Father, there are times he leaves us to work things out and there are times he intervenes.

The Bible repeatedly and graphically shows us what happens when His marriage mandate in Genesis Chapter 2 v 24 is ignored. The mandate - **a man** [singular], **shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife** [singular], **and they shall become one flesh**. The Bible is good at affirming faithful and kind men and husbands like Joseph (of Mary and Joseph). And the Bible is good at critiquing unfaithful and self-centred men who use their power for ill.

At this point in the story, David is once again on the run. Not on the run from Saul, but from his son Absalom who is staging a coup. For some time, Absalom has been turning the hearts of the people against David to him. In 2 Samuel Chapter 15 verse 6 we are told he is literally stealing their hearts.

It's an incredibly complicated and messy affair. Absalom is trying to claim the throne not for justice's sake but for his sake. It's civil war in the house of David and on a national level. Absalom is absolutely responsible for his actions and choices. And David has not been a good husband or dad. It's both ... and.... Life is full of both... and....

David was not involved with his children as he should have been. David did not call his son Amnon to account or punish him, when he raped his sister. After 2 years of David saying and doing nothing, Absalom killed Amnon then ran for the hills. After 3 years, David took Absalom back, but it seems nothing was addressed and everything just festered. The ill-will built and built and then erupted. Absalom rallied supporters to his cause and by the time David heard about the conspiracy to overthrow him, it was too late to do anything about. All David and those loyal to him could do is flee. This takes us to 2 Samuel chapter 16.

In this chapter, a place called Bahurim is mentioned. It's worth explaining that Bahurim is a few miles east of Jerusalem on the Jericho Road. This road goes East out of Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives, heading towards the Jordan Valley. We are told in the passage that David and his crew were on a hilltop path one side of the valley and Shimei was on the other side of the valley So, it was much more of a ravine than is in the picture.

BIBLE: 2 Samuel 16:5-14 - This is the word of God.

⁵ As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. ⁶ He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. ⁷ As he cursed, Shimei said, 'Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! ⁸ The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!'

⁹ Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, ‘Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.’

¹⁰ But the king said, ‘What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, “Curse David,” who can ask, “Why do you do this?”’

¹¹ David then said to Abishai and all his officials, ‘My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me [Absalom]. How much more, then, this Benjaminite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. ¹² It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today.’

¹³ So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. ¹⁴ The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.

What do you do when you are attacked?

What do you do when you get pelters?

What do you do when someone has a go at you?

STORY: This passage made me think of a time when I was 18 or 19. Me and my friend got jumped outside our local shop in Culloden, Inverness by two boys the same age. My friend being English was a factor in this. The insults made that clear. I got hit over the head, knocked to the ground and my head was split open. He ran into the shop shouting on them to call the police before trying to get the attackers off me. It was a painful and humiliating experience.

After I had been up to A&E and had my cut seen to, I wanted?...Vengeance! So, me and my friend rounded up some of our other friends and went out in his dad’s van looking for the two boys. What I wanted to do was pay them back for what they had done to me. We drove around winding each other up, discussing what we would do to them if we found them. There was lots of bravado. There was an incredible sense of camaraderie because we were *rallying to a just cause!* After driving around for a while we...didn’t find them! By the grace of God, we didn’t find them. They were picked up by the police, were charged and ultimately found guilty of assault and punished.

Q. What would have happened if we had found them do you think?

Q. What would have happened if we had paid them back?

Q. Would that have been the end of it?

It would not have been. Things would have escalated. It would have been disastrous. That's because in my heart of hearts, I wanted vengeance rather than justice. Vengeance is different from justice.

Pastor Jeff White helps us to think through some features of vengeance and the difference between vengeance and justice. Here are 8 points...

1. Vengeance can feel right, seem right, because it takes the wounds seriously, but vengeance is not wise - it clouds judgement.
2. Vengeance (when I am on the receiving end) encourages me to think like this...*the pain you cause me feels worse than the pain I cause you*
3. Vengeance (when I am on the giving end) encourages me to think like this...*...the pain I cause you, is never as bad as the pain you cause me.*
4. The spirit of vengeance takes delight in seeing people wounded – there is a gleefulness about it.
5. Operating out of a place of vengeance makes it really difficult to pay back fairly and proportionately and objectively. For example, if you feel you've under done your pay back, you may want to go back for seconds. If the other person feels they've been paid back more than they should have been, they will want that redressed – that's why feuds and family feuds can go on forever. All you need is one Abishai type in your group.
6. Justice will allow for 3rd parties such as the police and the justice system to evaluate and administer justice and punishment. Justice is dispassionate (which is not the same as uncaring). It was much, much better that the police caught the boys and the justice was done through the justice system.
7. Justice can de-escalate matters, interrupt tit-for-tat cycles and stop the downward spiral of destruction. Justice can open up opportunities for repentance, restoration and transformation. Ideally people punished by prison are not just punished but become reformed characters who can go on to contribute positively to society.
8. Vengeance echoes the, "Cut their head off, end them!" cry of Abishai.

How fortunate we are to have a justice system in Scotland and the kind of justice system that is rooted in the dignity, value and worth of people and the recognition of personal property. How fortunate we are not living at the heights of the Scottish clan warfare and blood feuds. But that's how it is elsewhere in the world and that's what we see in the passage.

Shimei is from the same clan as Saul's family. Bahurim is the tribal region of Benjamin – the house of Saul as you may remember is from the tribe of Benjamin. The house of Jesse and David is from the tribe of Judah. The dividing lines are and the hostility is still there. Shimei starts lobbing insults and stones from the other side of the ravine. For the time being he's out of reach of David and his men.

What does Shimei say? Well, he calls David a murderer – which he is. And a scoundrel, which he is. But Shimei was wrong to say that David was Saul's usurper and responsible for Saul's downfall. David did not and would not lay a hand on Saul because he was King. Saul was his own worst enemy and brought his own downfall. We're not told what the other insults and curses were. I imagine quite colourful.

Abishai who was David's nephew and general Joab's brother, wants to take Shimei's head off. He offers to chase Shimei down and end him.

David on this occasion does not go down the path of vengeance. David orders Shimei to be left alone. Two things seem to be influencing David. The first is David's sense that God is the ultimate Judge. The second is to do with God's covenant blessing.

1. God the ultimate Judge

Recognising God as the ultimate judge and that remembering **"Vengeance is mine," says the Lord** (Dt 32:35) is a very good thing.

Theologian Miroslav Volf is the professor and director of the Yale Centre for Faith and Culture at Yale University. He grew up in Croatia. His family endured some terrible things during the wars in the Balkans. One of the things he found compelling about Christianity and Jesus was the effect it and Jesus had on his father and family. Miroslav saw his father who had been imprisoned in a slave labour camp love and forgive and care for his cruel captors. You see, his father took Jesus' love and forgiveness seriously. His father also took God's promise to ensure justice be done seriously. **'Vengeance is mine!' says the Lord.**

In His book *Exclusion and Embrace* (p303-304) Miroslav writes...*"if God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make the final end to violence, God would not be worthy of our worship...violence thrives, secretly nourished by belief in a God who refuses to wield the sword....belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West.*

To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture [on justice] in a war zone. Among your listeners are people who [have been plundered, raped, brutalised and seen loved ones murdered]...In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent...the [notion of a]...God who refuses to judge...will invariably die [with] other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind...[which were] birthed in the quiet of a suburban home."

If you really believe that God will ensure justice is done, if a people group really believes that there is eternal justice - that will act as a restraint. Believing in a God of justice and judgement does not add fuel to the fire or make people act hellishly - it quenches the fires of hatred and retaliation.

Miroslav and the Bible also make it clear that Jesus being the ultimate Judge shouldn't stop us from pursuing justice in the present before Jesus returns to right all wrongs. In fact, the Bible and Jesus encourages, equips us and the Holy Spirit empowers us to be champions of justice and reconciliation now. The Holy Spirit helps us to come not in the spirit of Abishai but in love. It was the love of Jesus and the forgiveness of Jesus at work in Miroslav's dad's heart that made the difference. God's love and grace and mercy is not at odds with him being the ultimate judge and ensuring justice is done. They go hand in hand.

2. God's Covenant Blessing

Miroslav's dad's heart was changed by knowing that Jesus loved him and died for him and extended grace and mercy when he did not deserve it and had not earned it. Miroslav's dad knew that he was a sufferer and a sinner in need of a Saviour. Something of this seems to be going on with David in the passage.

¹² It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today.'

David, in this encounter, with stone and insults flying was mindful of God's covenant blessing. God's love and faithfulness and the mercy that had been extended to undeserving him gave him pause for thought. Maybe he was thinking about what he deserved and how God would be justified in ending him, given what he had done. This doesn't mean that Shimei was in the right or that the stones and insults were ok. This doesn't mean that when we are on the receiving end of pelters or stones or verbal or physical attack it is ok. But calling to mind God's covenant blessing, his hesed unfailing love, that we are dependent on his grace and mercy because we are both sufferers and sinners doesn't just affect our behaviour, it affects our heart and our motives.

Knowing that when we...

... are unfaithful, Jesus is faithful

... sin, Jesus forgives

...treat Jesus like an enemy, he dies for us so we can be friends.

...do evil, Jesus repays our evil with good

...ignore Jesus, he remembers us

changes us and the atmosphere and spiritual climate.

So, when someone attacks, gives us pelters, curses or we to do?

This is what Apostle Paul writes from Romans chapter 8.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse....

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil...

¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^[d] says the Lord.

**²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...**

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Again, just to re-iterate this doesn't mean being a door mat or not defending yourself or pursuing justice.

It does mean coming not in the spirit of Abishai but in Jesus' Spirit.

It's so easy reacting and responding to people who have a go at you or your tribe by going Abishai on them in your head and heart or conversation online or in person. It's so easy going Abishai (*off with their heads!*) in aggressive and passive aggressive ways. It's so easy to get caught up in all of that.

But that is not Jesus' way. This is what Jesus says in Matthew 5:43-45 and its worth being reminded of. Jesus says ⁴³ **"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'** ⁴⁴ **But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** ⁴⁵ **that you may be children of your Father in heaven.**

Does this come naturally? No.

Does Abishai's spirit comes naturally. Yes! And all too easily.

God knows I and we need help on this front.

The good news is that Jesus' Spirit comes supernaturally.

And He has promised to help us when we ask him.

So, let's ask him for help now.

PRAY

Lord, sorry for our Shimei reactions and tendencies when we fire shots at people from our high horse.

Sorry for our Abishai reactions and tendencies where we harbour vengeance and look to or work to ruin people or take delight in seeing people we don't like hurt.

Jesus please root out these bitter roots.

Jesus help us to know that you are the ultimate Judge and help us to know how much we need you as Saviour and all you went through to forgive us.

Help us to overcome evil with good.

Help us to do this creatively and courageous and consistently.

Lord Jesus, we need your help. Come Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit change our hearts.

Where we have been wounded, we ask for your healing.

Lord Jesus, where we have had lies or insults spoken over us that have stuck and still affect us, we ask that you break their power and any hold they have over us. Help us to see ourselves as you see us and the truth that sets us free.

We pray for justice to be done and our justice system in our nation and around the world.

We pray for cycles of violence and vengeance to be disrupted.

We pray for healing, reconciliation and restoration in couples and families.

We pray for the end of feuds and wars and strong peace and peacemakers.

Holy Spirit Come.

We pray for Godly camaraderie that comes when we are united in you Jesus and seeking first your kingdom and righteousness. Stir it up oh Lord.

God bless the Care Van teams that go out in the Jesus Spirit.

God bless the Café team and Oasis teams.

God bless all the wee Jesus teams and the global Jesus team.

Help us to turn to you, help us to reflect your character and nature to the world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.