

Ordained by the LORD

2Samuel 17:1-29

The difference we find in the faith and works of the apostles of Jesus before and after His resurrection from the dead is truly amazing.

After Jesus death His closest followers were struggling to believe and they had locked themselves in a room afraid for their lives.

After His resurrection and seeing Him for forty days they going out daily into the city of Jerusalem and into the Temple courts telling people that Jesus is the Saviour they needed.

That change would have been impossible if Jesus had died and stayed dead, but there they were preaching, teaching, and doing miracles in Jesus' Name because the power that raised Christ from the dead, which is the power of Almighty God, was at work in them.

Many could see that and so many came to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins in the early days of the Church.

There were also those, however, those who remained hard hearted towards Jesus and were very much opposed to the message being preached by the apostles.

Men of power and influence, the same men who had Jesus handed over to Pilate to be crucified, had the apostles arrested and "put them in the public prison" according to acts chapter five.

What happens next is amazing. That night 'an angel of the LORD' came broke them out of prison and told them to 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.'

So when the sun comes up they go to the Temple and preach.

When the guys who put them in jail send to have them brought before them, the jail is found locked and secured but no apostles.

While they were still trying to figure it out someone came and told them that the guys they were looking for were over in the Temple "teaching the people."

You might think that would give the religious leaders some pause, but it doesn't and when the apostles appear before them again they say, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name..."

Peter speaks up and says, "We must obey God rather than men", he tells them the gospel, and says the power of the Holy Spirit is on their side.

The bible says the religious leaders, "were enraged and wanted to kill them."

At that moment a well-respected member of this council, a man named Gamaliel, stood up to address these men.

Because of his standing among them everyone came to attention.

He reminded them of a little history. He reminds them of two men who started movements that came to nothing.

The point of his speech was to say, “The works of men come to nothing. If what these preachers are saying is a human invention it will come to nothing.”

“On the other hand, if what they are saying and doing is from God you won’t be able to stop it, you will be found opposing God.”

Because of Gamaliel’s words they don’t kill the apostles, but they do have them beaten and tell them again to stop preaching about Jesus.

The apostles leave there, the bible says, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”

They go right on preaching and the church keeps growing, being persecuted, and growing more.

[That is a really big change from the fearful unbelieving men we see after the LORD Jesus died on the cross. I am convinced that one of the things the Holy Spirit changes in these men is the degree to which they can see and believe in the rule of God over everyday life. When Jesus’ died it looks like evil had won and they were afraid of what would happen next. When Jesus’ conquered the grave and the Holy Spirit came upon them in power they could see that God had planned it all. That is a lesson we need today every bit as much as the apostles at the beginning of the church. It is a lesson that God’s people in every age need. Everyday life being ordered by the One seated upon the throne of heaven is a theme in the Bible and we find it in our text this morning **2 Samuel 17:1-29**. The king of Israel, in these verses, is in the middle of a crisis. His son is seeking his life and he is on the run. Looking at the situation one might think that the LORD is nowhere to be found, but the truth is He is working everything out according to His will. As we see that happen there are some important truths for us to pay attention too. The first truth that we see is a difficult one, it is that...]

Point #1 – God allows people to pursue evil. (Verses 1-4)

According to His infinite knowledge, presence, and power the LORD permits people to chase after their own corrupt desires. I know that can be a struggle to understand, but it is the reality of what the Bible teaches and it is important for Christians to try to think rightly about that reality.

The beginning of chapter 17 is closely connected with the end of chapter 16.

The focus of the writer is on a man named Ahithophel.

A man of superior intelligence and someone who served as an advisor to King David and is now advising Absalom as he is seeking the throne of Israel.

They have taken the capital city of Jerusalem and are occupying the palace.

Ahithophel’s advice so far has been for Absalom to sin against his father for everyone in city to see so that there would be an irremovable divide between the two.

The only thing that remained to complete the conspiracy was to put an end to David’s life.

That is exactly what is suggested in **verses 1-3**.

The fact that 12000 men are available to implement this plan gives us an idea of just how big this conspiracy had grown.

I agree with commentators who see the selection of 12000 as an intentional illustration.

12 is the number of tribes in Israel and selecting 12000 is a way of saying all the people are against David.

Also notice how the first person is emphasized by this man.

He says, "I will pursue David"... "I will strike only the king"... "I will bring the people back to you"

It is more than likely that Ahithophel has a personal grudge against David which explains his willingness to betray him.

The goal is simple, kill David and all the people will come over to Absalom and there will be peace, it says at the end of verse 3.

There is some irony there. Absalom's name means, "My father is peace" and the way this advice intends to bring peace is by killing his father God's chosen King.

From a strategic standpoint this is good advice we can see that in **verse 4**.

The plan makes sense to the people involved, but it is an evil thing that is proposed.

Is God unaware of the plan? Not at all. How many of you know that God knows everything? How long has He known everything? He has always known it!

Could God have stopped it before it got to this point? Yes because the Bible teaches us that the LORD does all that He pleases.

It is inescapable. Because of Who God is in the nature of His Being we must conclude that He is allowing Ahithophel to make this proposal.

It is important to point out that the LORD is not causing him to chase after evil or putting the thought in his head, but He is allowing it for His purposes.

[Way back when I had small children I took one of them to the park near our house in London. About 500 yards from the playground there was a duck pond and that she loved. She started to go in that direction and I let her go on her own to see how far she would go before she turned around looking for me. She got half way and never turned around so I quickly chased her down and took her by the hand to see the ducks. I didn't make her go, I could have stopped her anytime, but I let her go because I wanted to see what she would do.]

That is a very imperfect picture of what we are talking about here. Ahithophel is only able to pursue the evil he has in mind because the LORD permits it.

We know from chapter twelve that part of God's purpose here is to fulfill what he had said to David through the prophet Nathan.

We'll also see by the end of this chapter that the LORD actually uses this advice to deal with Ahithophel.

Now, I'm not suggesting that the Bible explains God's particular purposes behind every decision He makes in terms of what He permits in the world.

I am saying that nothing happens in the entirety of the universe apart from the knowledge and power of God and I am saying that He has a purpose in it all.

[For us, everything that happens is a fork in the road where we can decide to trust the LORD and draw closer to Him or we can decide to harden our hearts towards Him. I have a great deal of empathy for people who are bitter in their spirit because of bad things that have happened. Denying Who God is will never make that better. Turning away from God is a vain attempt to make evil meaningless and purposeless. It doesn't help, we can see that time and again in the scriptures and in the history of the World. Yes there is evil in the world, but it is neither meaningless nor is it unrestrained. We see that next in our passage, yes God allows people to pursue evil but we also see that...]

Point #2 – God governs people pursuing evil. (Verses 5-14)

The LORD is actively involved in every part of creation every second of every day throughout every age. He never misses a thing and He sets limits on the actions of every creature He has made.

If we remember the context of the end of chapter 16 verses 5-6 here should strike us as unexpected.

The end of chapter 16 says that the counsel of Ahithophel was treated as though it was on the same level as God's word.

That, I believe, is a way of saying people who asked for this guy's advice always did what he said.

His plan is simple and everyone thinks it is a fantastic idea. Why then does Absalom ask for Hushai to weigh in?

That is especially strange when you consider that Absalom knows how close a friendship Hushai had with David.

Why is doubt raised in Absalom's mind and why have the thought to ask for the counsel of David's friend?

It is the hand of the LORD at work here.

When Hushai hears the Ahithophel's plan, contrary to the opinion of everyone else in the room, he says this in **Verse 7**.

When he says here that it is "not good" he is not talking about the moral quality of the plan, he is talking about the effectiveness of the plan.

Now he can't just say, "That is a bad idea" if he is going to steer Absalom in a different direction, he has to give a reason and he also has to give an alternative plan.

In verses 8-10 he gives his reason. He reminds Absalom that David is mighty warrior and so are the men with him.

He says David knows better than to stay with his people in the camp and if the camp is attacked and some of Absalom's men fall then word will spread that David gained the upper hand and people will lose their courage.

Those are all reasonable possibilities and excellent tools for raising doubts about proceeding with the first plan.

Having highlighted the problems, Hushai offers this as an alternative in **Verses 11-13**.

There is more going on in that advice than odds and statistics.

The language of gathering people like the "sand by the sea" so they can descend upon David like "the dew falls on the ground" is clearly a picture of overwhelming force.

It is easy to see how a godless person would put great confidence in those kinds of numbers, but there is more than that.

Do you see it there at the end of verse 11? His counsel is that Absalom go in person to the battle.

Who then will get the glory for defeating David? What Hushai is doing is he is feeding the pride of this young man.

Now look at **Verse 14**.

The word translated 'ordained' here can also be translated as 'commanded' or 'appointed'.

The word is also emphatic in the original language giving the sense of a resolved determination.

The LORD here is firmly committed to stopping "the good counsel of Ahithophel" again the word 'good' here is not being used in a moral sense but is indicating the effectiveness of the plan.

In other words if the plan were implemented and God were to do nothing, the plan would have succeeded.

God is reigning in the evil that is proposed. He is doing it in this particular way because he is going to bring judgment against Absalom for his own rebellion and sin.

[We see this time and again in the scriptures with creatures that are intent on evil, even the devil himself. Remember when he wanted to harm Job, God set limits on what he could do. Remember dark arts of Pharaoh's magicians? God set limits on what they could do.]

That is how it is with every force of evil.

The battle between good and evil is not a 50-50 proposition as some might think.

As Martin Luther writes in his wonderful hymn, 'A Mighty Fortress is our God'

And though this world, with devils filled,

Should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed

His truth to triumph through us:

The Prince of Darkness grim,

We tremble not for him;

*His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

That is both wonderful and true.

[Yes the LORD permits people and creatures to pursue evil, but no matter what they may desire or design they can only go as far as God permits and no farther. Will we understand or enjoy everything that happens? No, there is much grief and great sorrow in this fallen world. The bigger question we must wrestle with is can we trust that God is in control? That is an important question to ask because the LORD rarely works in the world in a super natural or miraculous way. He does that for sure, but most often He works in ways similar to what we see in this text. We see it in the verses we have already looked at and we see it in the next part of the text as well. We see that...]

Point #3 – God uses ordinary situations to accomplish His will. (Verses 15-23)

The hand of the LORD is in every day events that we often pay no attention to. What we might see as chance and probability is actually the purposeful actions of our glorious Creator.

Verse 15 reminds us of some others who are acting as spies for David in Jerusalem, the priests Zadok and Abiathar.

They are to relay the intelligence that Hushai gathers to David through their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan.

Hushai tells them in verses 15-16 to get the latest news to David and to tell him to get across the Jordan River and get ready for what is coming.

Look with me at what happens in **verses 17-21**.

Nothing extraordinary happens here.

As Ahimaaz and Jonathan begin their journey we might say they run into a bit of bad luck being spotted by a servant of Absalom.

How easy would it have been for them to be discovered?

They choose to hideout in a well and being in a well they would be completely helpless.

Then an un-named woman at the house of an un-named man makes a covering over the well and scatters some grain upon the cover to hide them.

When Absalom's servants arrive at the house they are sure the spies are there, but after searching they do not find them and are turned back to Jerusalem.

An untimely sneeze, a suspicious look at an out of place pile of grain, a nervous glance from the woman and they would have been discovered.

Why does it work? Why are they able to get out a get the news to David?

Because the LORD is working in these seemingly everyday events to make it happen.

We see the outcome in **verses 22-23**.

David is able to put some distance between himself and Absalom and the betrayal of Ahithophel is overcome.

Ahithophel's motivation is not made clear here.

Was he conscience stricken and grieved for what he had done to David? It is possible.

Some commentators think that he is convinced that Absalom's rejection of his counsel has made David's return to the throne certain and rather than be at the mercy of the king he betrayed he took matters into his own hands.

Whatever his motives his betrayal has led to his own destruction and that has happened through God working in things that seem completely ordinary.

His betrayal did not stop the LORD from bringing about the rescue of His chosen King.

If you are thinking that sounds familiar you would be right.

Some commentators say that Ahithophel presents the strongest parallel in the whole Bible to Judas Iscariot the disciple of Jesus.

Just like Ahithophel's betrayal of the king led him to destroy himself, Judas betrayal of the King of kings leads to him to destroy himself.

Just like God worked through the betrayal of Ahithophel to bring about His will, so too He would work through the betrayal of Judas to work out His plan of salvation.

Judas betrayed Jesus on account of evil intentions prodded along by Satan Himself.

But what was the result? Jesus dying was no defeat, His death was the means by which we can be forgiven.

In His death Jesus took upon Himself the penalty of our sins so that we could be washed clean and made right with God.

Many of the events that led to the cross would have seemed quite ordinary, but they led to the glorious miracle of Jesus' resurrection which is the foundation for our hope for eternal life.

[Do we realize that the LORD is still very much at work today? Do we have eyes to see Him at work in what seems to be a random phone call, a chance meeting, a near miss accident, bumping into someone at the grocery store, or the millions of other things that happen every day? Most people come to believe the gospel through what seems like commonplace circumstances, but what a miracle that happens as a result. A person going from being dead in their sins to being alive in Christ is no small thing. Why does it happen? Because the LORD is at work in the world. That brings us to one more important truth that we need to see. So far we have seen that God allows people to pursue evil, that He governs evil, that He uses ordinary situations, and finally we see that...]

Point #4 – God never fails because everything is under His control. (Verses 24-29)

Nothing in all creation can separate the Christian from the love of God because there is nothing in all creation that can resist His command.

Verses 24-26 set the stage for us.

David and his men camp in a place called Mahanaim and Absalom and his men camp at a place called Gilead making preparations to go into battle with his father.

Where David chooses to camp is very interesting.

The place got its name from Jacob back in Genesis 32.

Jacob had camped there as we was returning to Canaan after living twenty years with his uncle.

When Jacob got to this place the bible says that “the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, ‘This is God’s camp!’ So he called the name of that place Mahanaim (which means two-camps).”

There is the camp of God and the camp of humans in the same place.

It is a place that reminds us that people can camp with God or they can camp against God.

This place makes us ask the question, ‘when the plans of man are against the plans of God who will prevail?’

Verses 27-29 point us to the answer.

The end of verse 29 gives us a sense of how vulnerable David and those with him were to the proposal that Ahithophel had made at the beginning of the chapter.

The three men responsible for bringing the King some provisions do so because they know that the people with David are “hungry and weary and thirsty”.

They need food, they need rest, and they need water. All very important needs especially if you are about to go into battle.

The help these men provide is absolutely crucial to preserving David’s life and returning him to the throne, but why do they help?

Go back to the middle of verse 14 for a moment.

It says there that, “...*the LORD ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel.*”

Why is that relevant to what is said here in verses 27-29?

In Hebrew writing we often find that literary sections are structured in such a way as to have a specific focal point in the text.

Commentator Ronald Youngblood makes a very convincing case that verse 14 is the focal point of chapters 15-20 in the book of 2Samuel which cover the events of Absalom’s rebellion against David.

If that is correct, and I think it is, then we are supposed to see God’s ability to command what happens in His creation stamped on everything that happens in these verses.

Why do these guys show up with what David and his people need?
Because God ordained it.

Each of them has a history with David. Each of them could have decided to go over to Absalom's side, but instead they use their resources to help the king who seems helpless at the moment.

Why because God commanded it in ages past. He created these men, He gave them their position and wealth, He convicted them to come and help, and so David and those with him are strengthened.

What we are supposed to see here is that there is nothing and no one in all creation that falls outside the commands of God.

Because He has the final authority over everything evil will eventually come to nothing and the promises of the LORD will stand forever.

Yes there is evil in the world that God permits and with that comes many tears and many questions, but we need to know that we can trust the LORD even when we don't understand.

We also need to know that the LORD has set limits on evil. It can only go as far as He permits.

God is not leaving things to chance He is present and at work in the world through what may seem ordinary to us, oh that we would have eyes to see it.

Perhaps if we could see that then we could learn to trust in His will and ways that cannot fail because He commands it all.

Let's pray towards that end.