

April 14

2 Samuel 16-18

Hey there, Klint Bitter here again with April 14th's Project 4:4 daily Accelerator.

Our reading today continues and concludes the story of Absalom's rebellion in 2 Samuel chapters 16-18.

There's some interesting stuff to unpack from our reading today. One of the things that caught my attention was the loyalty of those close to David. Sure, it appears from the reading, that many split. But there were many who stuck by David's side...even taking great risks for the king. This is where the story evolves into a fast-paced kind of espionage thriller. The priests are pretending to be neutral while setting a 'spy ring' of sorts into place. Even Absalom's chief counsel was infiltrated by those loyal to David. Hushai is that man.

Imagine the tension of those moments...here's one of David's closest friends, meeting Absalom at the gate to the city offering his allegiance. Absalom was surely suspicious. The stakes were incredibly high. If Absalom would have found his true motive...well, let's just say it wouldn't have been pretty for Hushai.

Do you remember David's short prayer yesterday's reading? He prayed that God would turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness. Ahithophel's disloyalty must have been a heart breaking betrayal for David. Ahithophel was one of David's closest advisors. Scripture says that, "in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God." A high compliment.

As the story unfolds, we see God answer David's prayer. Hushai and Ahithophel offer Absalom opposing suggestions. Certainly Ahithophel's advice, if taken, would have made David's eventual victory much more difficult. They would not have had time to organize and plan a strategy for the battle.

So, why did Absalom listen to Hushai? The text doesn't tell us directly. But I see two things to draw out from the broader context: First, without question we see God's sovereign hand at work in all of this. I don't know why God allows evil men to do the things they do but I believe – as Scripture says – that God will work all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. Those words written so many, many years later were true well before their time. That's evidenced here. God would certainly orchestrate this coup to fulfill his Kingdom purposes. Maybe that truth, that God is working all things to the good of those who love him, means rest for you today.

The next thing I see that speaks to why Absalom takes Hushai's advice is Absalom's fatal arrogance. Hushai paints a picture of Absalom as the mighty leader; leading the charge of all Israel against his father and those loyal to him. It's a grand picture that played right into Absalom's grand sense of self. Remember that this is the guy that had 50 men running before his chariot to announce his presence; he believed

he could overthrow and govern better than his honored father; he believed that Israel would reject his father and follow him; and let's not forget that he built a monument to honor his own greatness. Certainly, Hushai set the appropriate snare.

We've read how the story ends. Something I learned or was reminded of, which I found interesting; did you notice how Absalom was buried? He was buried in a pit with a pile of stones on top. In the Mosaic Law, a child who rebels against his parents is to be stoned to death. Absalom's burial was likely a statement to all of Israel reflecting that Mosaic rule.

Reading carefully through this story, I'm amazed at the difference between the character we see in David and what we see in Absalom. Absalom is determined to take, by force, what he wants. He's not interested in waiting for what will some day, definitely, be his. He's not concerned with who gets hurt in the process. He's completely consumed with a self-centered goal and he'll hurt anyone, burn any bridges, go to any length to get it. It's this desperate, selfish pursuit that will lead to Absalom's untimely end.

Contrast that with David. I remarked yesterday that this feels like David at his best. He's walking in deep surrender to God. At first reading I thought, "why didn't David do something?" I mean, his son rises up against him and he *leaves*? Sure, we may be tempted to think David is taking the easy road here and being a bit "pacifist", which is certainly not what we've seen from him before. (remember all the conquest Israel saw under David's leadership?) It's also not what we see in the stories end and all the blood that's shed. But, that was not David's doing. He wasn't the aggressor this time.

Actually, I think it may have been easier – in some respects – for David to have holed up in the city and prepared for a bloody battle. Instead, with David leaving the city, we see an expression of loving leadership. I'm reading between the lines a little here, but I can't help but wonder if David's departure from the city is an expression of protection for the people of Israel. It seems that David was trying to minimize not only the drama – evidenced in his attitude of surrender to the will of God – but he was also trying to minimize the danger to the people.

The contrast of these two and their approach to power, leadership and influence speak volumes to the content of their character. This prompts some solid, heart level-questions for us. We're called to mold our lives after Jesus, he's the ultimate model. However, in the context of this story, I'm asking: do the rhythms and patterns of my life – at home, at work, socially – reflect a character more like David's or more like Absalom's? And then there's the bigger question...why?

If I'm in a cycle of self-serving, trample anyone, out of bounds attempts to exert power and authority...why? What is it in my heart that's pushing me that direction? If you're in that boat, own it today and invite God to root it out. May the words of David from Psalm 139 be on your heart today, "search me, O God, and

know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Take some time today to reflect on this story and listen to the prompting of God’s Spirit to see if there’s anything in you that needs to be put to death in pursuit of Christ.

Likewise, if reflection is revealing purity in your heart, pause and remember where that comes from. It’s a gift of our great God.

This is Klint Bitter, until tomorrow, may every part of your life point others to Jesus.