2 Samuel Message 18 (2023)

**Where is He?**

(**Following His Guidance**)

*2 Samuel 16:1-14*

*Key Verse: 16:12*

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

 In the last chapter 15, we witnessed David’s flight from Absalom’s rebellion. To improve our understanding, let me show you a diagram of Jerusalem (Pic 1). When the king set out the palace, he met Ittai, the Gittite, who just joined Israel, but kept loyal to David by declining to entering Absalom’s ruling. After the king crossed the Kidron Valley, Zadok and Abiathar, the priests appeared carrying the ark to comfort him with God’s assurance. But David knew the ark could not guarantee God’s blessing. Going up the Mount of Olives with deep sorrow, which reminds us of Jesus’s weeping over Israel at the Mount of Olives, David fell into despair at the news; the brilliant counselor, Ahithophel colluded in the rebellion; among in the traitors. At the summit, David met his friend and counselor Hushai, who returned to the palace with David’s instruction to contradict Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom.

 While David was fleeing from Absalom, God kept answering to David’s prayer by sending such loyal and genuine people.

**Part 1. Ziba was crafty and David was reckless.**

Today’s passage starts with a certain place beyond this summit. Let’s read verse 1. When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine. There Ziba, Mephibosheth’s steward came up to David. Ziba was shrewd enough to anticipate the failure of Absalom’s treason. So, he displayed his loyalty, providing donkeys, a lot of food and wine to David. Ziba’s provision must have looked like an angel’s provision because David could not bring any foods escaping from Absalom. Then, David asked, “Where is your master’s grandson?” We can notice that David was calling Ziba as a king Saul’s servant, not Mephibosheth’s. It implies that, at Ziba’s alone appearance without Mephibosheth, David already formed a little bit negative conviction toward Mephibosheth. For, in chapter 9, David ordered Ziba to serve Mephibosheth as his master.

Ziba’s answer was very shocking. He said Mephibosheth remained in Jerusalem because he believed, in this political turmoil, he would be a king over Israel by restoring Saul’s kingship. It was very hard for David to ignore Ziba’s accusation because Mephibosheth had a grown-up son, Mika, who could inherit the kingship of Saul (2 Sam 9:12). David’s decision was quick and solid; he ordered to deprive Mephibosheth of all his property, and to give it to Ziba.

There can be a discrepancy on whether Ziba’s report was true or not. In this regard, the bible says Mephibosheth had not taken care of his feet or trimmed his mustache or washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he returned safely (2 Sam 19:24). And in chapter 19, Mephibosheth answered David that Ziba betrayed, abandoned and accused him falsely to the king although Mephibosheth wanted to go with the king. Even when David ordered to divide the land between them, Mephibosheth furthered “Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has returned home safely.” (2 Sam 19:30).

However, David’s apparently rash judgment might be understandable at this moment of turmoil. He must have been very upset at Ziba’s accusation because David had taken care of Mephibosheth for several years, always having a table together with him. And politically, David’s decision was wise because Mephibosheth could be a potential rival to David’s throne.

Nonetheless, it is a shame that David did not seek another source to confirm Ziba’s accusation. By legal terminology, Ziba’s accusation is called hearsay evidence, meaning an indirect statement, thus inadmissible to the court. In other words, Ziba’s report should not be accepted by the king David because it could not be proved by the other independent testimony and moreover, Ziba’s report entirely coincided with his interest; not trustworthy. It was because the most probable beneficiary whould be Ziba if David retrieves his trust from Mephibosheth.

Another serious problem was that by dispossessing Mephibosheth’s belongings, David came to break his covenant with Jonathan, the father of Mephiboseth. Let’s read 1 Sam 20:14 to 17. 14. But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD … 15. and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family …" 16. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David … 17. And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. By Jonathan’s help, David barely escaped from king Saul, and right before the escape, he covenanted with Jonathan to show everlasting kindness, protecting Jonathan’s descendants in any circumstances. But because of political and emotional turbulence, David not only rushed to the crucial judgment based on a lacking ground but also violated the covenant with Jonathan, to whom he owed his life.

**Part 2. Shimei’s curse and David’s repentance**

David’s fear of another rebellion by Saul’s descendants, Benjamites, became concretized when David approached Bahurim. There Shimei, a Benjamite, a distant relative of Saul, came up. Shimei was an influential figure in the Benjamites because when David returned from the escape, Shimei followed by a thousand Benjamites, came to Jordan River to meet David.

Bahurim was the village located in the east of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin about 4 miles away from Jerusalem (Pic 2). Before David became a king over all Israel and Judea, he demanded Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, to send back his wife Michal. When Abner took away Michal from his husband Paltiel, Paltiel followed her weeping to Bahurim. All Benjamite witnessed this tragic incident with bitter heart, and had a grudge against David.

Shimei cursed David as a man of bloodshed, throwing stones at David. He dared to say that God punished David because of all the blood of Saul’s household David shed. It could be that Shimei was accusing David of the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, Abner and Ishbosheth. Shimei’s assertion sounds plausible because David seemed to be involved with all these deaths in some sense. But not correct. King Saul and Jonathan died during the battle against Philistines at Gilboa. However, the Benjamites might regard there was a conspiracy of David because David was protected by Philistines from Saul at that time. Abner was murdered by Joab, David’s chief general, and Ishboseth was murdered by his two subjects. In overall, because the Benjamites believed that behind all these murders was David, Shimei cursed and blamed David for the decline of the Benjamite tribe.

At Shimei’s unjust provocation, Abishai asked for David’s permission to behead him. In contrast to his reckless reaction to Ziba’s false accusation, at this occasion, David was patient, not allowing Abishai’s revenge. Instead he said “My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite!” (16:11a). It signifies his beloved son, Absalom’s treason fell David into deep dejection. David went on to say, “Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord had told him to.” (16:11b). Of course, God did not tell Shimei to curse David because Lord commanded us not to curse the ruler of people in Exodus (Ex 22:18).

The different response was because of David’s repentance. He accepted Shimei’s offense as God’s rebuking on his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. His lust gave birth to a murder, caused Amnon’s rape of Tamar, and the Absalom’s murder, and ultimately this uprising. Despite Shimei’s persistent curses, David continued along the road silently without any countering. And finally he said, let’s read verse 12 together. “It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today.” During God’s discipline, David was trying to stand before God because he believed God’s unfailing love and forgiveness.

**Part 3. Where is He?**

In chapter 15 through 19, the bible shows us many characters David encountered along with his flight and return to Jerusalem. In today’s passage, we met with three characters: Ziba, Shimei, and David. They reflect some characteristics in us.

Ziba was a shrewd person with a keen insight to tell who the ultimate winner in this power struggle would be. However, he was crafty to slander the innocent Mephibosheth. From his outlook, this turmoil was merely a good chance for him to steal the property of his master. Worldly speaking, he was a smart guy to accumulate his wealth during political disorder. But he was not pleasing to God. On the other hand, Shimei was a stubborn person who had nurtured resentment and harbored a grudge against David for more than 30 years. To him David’s helpless flight was a good opportunity for a revenge by pouring out his old resentment and grudge on David.

 Proverb says, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who heeds wisdom's instruction.” (Pro 29:18). Once we lose sight of God, we begin to be reckless. We set aside prayer and simply begin to act on our own initiative. This is a sign that we are on a spiritual downward path. While David made the mistake of convicting the reckless judgment on Mephibosheth, he was penitent and restrained himself from a revenge against Shimei. For through Shimei he heard God’s groaning in his sin. David was pleasing to God.

Then, our question is this; where is God while we are in the middle of suffering? In many cases we fail to obey God although we are all eager to listen to God’s sovereignty as David did. Jesus clearly said, “the Spirit of truth … you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:17), and the Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of all things Jesus told us (John 14:26). Then how can we discern Jesus’s voice among our war-like busy life? The first step is of course reading the bible daily, and keeping our conscience sensitive. His voice is not like a thunder but a soft and gentle whisper. So, it is easy for us to ignore His voice unless we keep our conscience so sensitive, which means not going against conscience. When we believe we heard God’s will to us, we must affirm this voice by the bible. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22, 23).

In my office, I have a young colleague who just graduated from college. A few other colleagues used to complain to me about her performance. Last week, I could have a chance of a quick meeting with her, and gave her some advice on her duties. But she seemed resistant to my advice. The next day, she collapsed apparently because of duty stress. Driving her to an emergency center, I felt guilty of her sickness. I became gloomy, realizing that my advice was based on my own judgment, and I had not asked for God’s guidance prior to my behavior. However, I am expecting this grief is to be a blessing because Godly sorrow brings repentance and salvation and leaves no regret (2 Co 7:10).

The habit of listening to God cannot be acquired in a day. Because David had formed his habit of listening to God since his young age, he could discern God’s sovereignty even during his urgent escape from Absalom. Without this discernment of God’s guidance, we keep falling into mistakes and ignore God’s presence in us during our life journey. However, despite our weaknesses and failure, it is much more important and essential to meditate God’s heart, whereby we can stand before God moment by moment. May we be able to make efforts to form this habit of listening to God and open our hearts to hear His Word. Let’s pray.