

The Life of David

Week 16: Faithful Mercy

2 Samuel 16

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- December 10, 2023

Good morning, Grace. Hey, more of that tonight—at 6:30 tonight we'll have a concert and see what these guys can do. We'll let 'em loose. I'll tell you more about that after our teaching time.

There are multiple stories in the life of David that give us an iconic picture of what it's like to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. There are stories that paint a picture that help us see vividly what it means to become like Christ in maybe one particular aspect of our lives.

And today we're going to look at 2 Samuel 16. And this story is for me. And you can listen in if you want.

When we look into the heart of King David at its best, you get to peer into the very heart of King Jesus. And today we're going to see again another aspect, another dimension, another perspective, on our salvation itself—another portrait.

In 2 Samuel 16, we should know that the context here is that David is reaping a harvest of consequences of many sins in his life. And at this stage, his very own son Absalom has caused a mutiny to break out. He desires to become king. And with his army, he is besieging the city of Jerusalem. And David is having to flee for his very life, surrounded by his faithful friends and his Gibborim, his mighty men.

2 Samuel 16:5-8

As King David [was fleeing Jerusalem], a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, from the same clan as Saul's family.

⁶ 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.

⁷ And Shimei said as he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! ⁸ 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."

Here's how the story goes. "As King David was fleeing Jerusalem, a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, from the same clan as Saul's family. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David, and all the people all the mighty men were on this right hand and 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.'"

Shimei is insane with pent up rage. He's not only from the tribe of Benjamin but also from this clan that is the clan of the former King Saul's. And he thinks David has stolen the kingly lineage from that clan.

And so now, with David surrounded by his mighty men, his Gibborim, these professional killers on his left and his right, Shimei is throwing rocks and dirt at them and calling David names.

2 Samuel 16:9

"Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" Abishai son of Zeruiah demanded. "Let me go over and cut off his head!"

And so, as you would imagine, one of those men says, *I can take care of this*. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" This is Abishai the son of Zeruiah. He demands

this: “Let me go over and cut off his head!” This is Abishai son of Zeruiah. Zeruiah is David’s sister. She has three sons that serve in David’s army. You might have heard of General Joab. This is his brother Abishai. And Abishai is listed in the chapter of the mighty men that we saw. And the mightiest of the mighty men were called “the three.” “The three” directly reported to the commanding officer of three, Abishai. He’s like Groot in *Guardians of the Galaxy*. He’s that stick person that only has one sentence. All he ever says in all of the movies is “I am Groot.” Abashai? There are three stories of him, and all he ever says is, “Can I kill this guy?” That’s what he says. No, I’m not kidding.

There’s a scene earlier when David was being hunted by King Saul. It was night time and King Saul is surrounded by his men to protect him. They are all sleeping at night, and David picks Abishai to go with him, and they sneak into the camp. And they’re standing over Saul, and Abishai says his line: “Let me kill King Saul for you, David. I can run him through and pin him to the ground.”

David’s response is something like, “What? You can’t raise your hand against God’s elect.”

And so, now here he is again, saying, “I’ll be back in five minutes and I’ll meet you at the end of the ditch.”

2 Samuel 16:10-12

But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’”

¹¹ Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn’t this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it. ¹² And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today.”

But here’s what happens. “King David says to him, ‘What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, “Go curse David,” who then shall say, “Why have you done so?”’ Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, ‘My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn’t this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave

him alone and let him curse.” Look at this. “ ‘For maybe the Lord Jehovah has told him to do it. And perhaps Jehovah will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses that are coming upon me today.’”

So, after he rebukes those men, as they’re on their way out of town, Shimei doesn’t stop. He follows them up the upper ridge, and he keeps throwing down rocks and dirt and calling out the king, calling him names. Wow. That’s the end of scene one.

2 Samuel 19:19-20

“My lord, the king, please forgive me,” he pleaded. “Forget the terrible thing your servant did when you left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind.²⁰ I know how much I have sinned. That is why I have come here today, the very first person in all Israel to greet my lord the king.”

Scene two, a few chapters later: Absalom has been killed and the mutiny has been squashed. And so, David is coming back to Jerusalem. And he’s about to cross the Jordan River, and guess who’s there? Shimei is running there to greet David when he comes back and falls face down. Here’s what he says: “ ‘My lord the king, please forgive me,’ he pleaded. ‘Forget the terrible thing your servant did when you left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind.’”

Let’s just not talk about it. Let’s just forget it ever happened. “ ‘I know how much I have sinned. That is why I have come here today, the very first person in all Israel to greet my lord the king.’”

Abishai, say your line.

Okay.

2 Samuel 19:21-23

Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, “Shimei should die, for he cursed the Lord’s anointed king!”

²² “Who asked your opinion, you sons of Zeruiah!” David exclaimed. “Why have you become my adversary today? This is not a day for execution, for today I am once again the king of Israel!”

²³ Then, turning to Shimei, David vowed, “Your life will be spared.”

“Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, ‘Shimei should die, for he cursed the Lord’s anointed king!’”

And then David: “ ‘Who asked your opinion, you sons of Zeruiah!’ David exclaimed.” Family, right? Anyway, “ ‘Why have you become my adversary today? This is not a day of execution, for today I am once again the king of Israel!’ Then, turning to Shimei, David vowed, ‘Your life will be spared.’”

This story about David, the glorious King David, mocked, falsely accused and humiliated in front of all of his troops, by the way—his mighty men—they’re watching this happen; every time I read it, I think, *This is everything I’m not. Where is the justice here? Why is this man allowed to breathe?* In other words, I’m kind of a team Abishai. I’ve got that shirt, I want a hat—Yeah, let’s go with Abishai on this thing. Why is this scoundrel allowed to live?

My response—and I’m not alone in this—even the Old Testament scholar **Robert Alter** writes this about this particular story. I’m going to read the whole quote: **“This is one of the most astonishing turning points in this story that abounds in human surprises. The proud, canny, often merciless David here resigns himself to accept the most stinging humiliation from a person he could easily have his men kill. David’s abasement is not a disguise, like Odysseus’s when he takes on the appearance of a beggar, but a real change in condition—from which, however, he will emerge in more than one surprising way. The acceptance of the humiliation is a kind of fatalism: if someone commits such a sacrilegious act against the man who is God’s anointed king, it must be because God has decreed it.”**

Hesed

This story is a picture or a portrait of undeserved mercy. There's a word in Hebrew for undeserved mercy. Anyone? *Hesed*. Here we are again—*hesed*. It'll sometimes be translated as “lovingkindness,” but there are nineteen different English words that we use as some form of synonym for *hesed* to try and describe what that single word that is an attribute of God means.

So, we've seen already as we've been running along, the loyal devotion that's undeserved, the covenant grace that's unmerited, and today we're going to look at dependable mercy that's unjustified.

When we have faith in God, when we have faith in His *hesed* mercy, it means that we're going to trust that He will withhold justice from us.

Grace vs. Mercy

I want us to look carefully at the subtle but dramatic difference between *hesed* grace that we looked at last week and the *hesed* mercy of this week. Grace is when you give someone unmerited favor, when you give someone something that's unmerited by them, a gift. Mercy is the withholding of merited justice when the person has actually earned this kind of wrath and you hold it back. When you look carefully at our salvation, it is mercy and it is grace. It's God withholding what we deserve, and that is alienation from Him in this life and in the next—Hell. He's holding that back from us. And then He's gifting us something we absolutely don't deserve, and that is intimacy with Him in this life and for eternity—Heaven. And so, mercy and grace are two sides of the same coin, and the coin's name is *hesed*.

And today we're focusing on mercy, because that's what is happening in this story. And I want to focus on that because in this storyline, we are Shimei. We have justice and wrath coming our way, and God in His mercy is holding that back and not letting it hear us. But know this about; *hesed* look at these attributes—it's the same definition, but now let's see it even more. *Hesed* is, first, costly. Look at the shame on David, being mocked in front of his peers. Look how selfless *hesed* is. David is humble, selfless. He's willing to receive this. This loyal mercy is

expressed in actions. It's something that is actually being done, and experienced, in this case, by Shimei.

If you've ever received this kind of *hesed* in your life from a brother or sister in Christ when they have withheld what you deserved (some kind of punishment), it's probably changed your life. If you have received it from God and really experienced that in salvation, it'll change your identity. It changes the very way you look at all of life.

James and John

When I was reading the passage, I was drawn to how he twice references his sister when he says "sons of Zeruiah." And I thought of New Testament Jesus saying "the sons of Zebedee" and what a problem they were for Jesus. The sons of Zebedee, James and John, were part of the inner circle of Peter, James, and John, which meant that they were granted inside experiences that some of the other disciples weren't, like the transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane. They had a special intimacy with Jesus. But James and John were given the nickname by Jesus himself "sons of thunder." And they're called "sons of thunder" because they were passionate and fiery in temperament.

Let me give you two examples of how they showed themselves to be this way. In Luke 9, Jesus has set his sights on Jerusalem. So, He's coming down from the north, and they're passing through Samaria, and Jesus says to James and John, "Hey, I want you to go ahead and go to this village and see where we can all stay." Well, there's a centuries-old prejudice between the Samaritans and the Jews, and so no one in the village is allowing them access. And so, they come back and they've been refused hospitality. And James and John have this attitude: No one disrespects the Lord Jesus. So, here's what they say: "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" And Jesus looked at them, and it says, "He rebuked the sons of Zebedee."

James and John felt like they were justified. This is righteous indignation here. And they felt like they had the authority of Elijah himself (there's an Old Testament story where Elijah calls down fire), and they are appealing to that and saying, *Can we just napalm this entire village? We should be able to incinerate every living thing, because they told us to move on.*

And Jesus is thinking, *Oh wow. Okay.*

There's another story when these men are ambitious. And they're grown men, and one of the last stories in the Gospels is when they ask their mommy to go to Jesus and get them a good place in the cabinet. And so, she does. She says, "Jesus, when Your kingdom comes, can you make sure that James and John are on Your right and on Your left?" You can bet they were loved for that.

And the reason I'm bringing this up, what triggers this "sons of thunder," is because when I look at these two men, I see the dramatic change they've had in their lives. Me? I'm into justice. I'm team Shimei. And I'm also very ambitious. And when I look at what happened in their lives—*hesed*—the mercy of God that they experienced with three years of working with Jesus radically altered who they were. They kept their zeal, but it was used in different ways.

James is the first of the twelve disciples to be named as a martyr. He's not the first martyr, he's just the first of the disciples—the only one mentioned in the Book of Acts as a martyr. And he died courageously—of course—he's a son of thunder. But he used that for the Gospel. He was beheaded.

John—*Let the wrath of God Almighty fall down upon the Samaritan village!*—hot-tempered, explosive, zealous—then *hesed* changed him. If it changed John, maybe it could change me. John, if you remember, is the disciple who followed Jesus all the way through His beating even to the place of the crucifixion. John saw firsthand the cost of *hesed* mercy, where God is holding back His wrath upon John and distributing it entirely upon Jesus. And that changes John. John wrote the Gospel of John. You might know that he wrote Revelation. But what I find interesting in his life changes is that he wrote 1, 2, and 3 John. And if I had to say what the big idea of those three books is, I would say that the big idea is love; not justice, not to beware, but love. Receive the love of God and give the love of God.

And so, the point is that if the sons of thunder can experience this kind of real change, that's the power of *hesed* mercy, and maybe that can work in my life. They are inspirations to me, those knuckleheads.

Why and How Can David Do This?

Let's look at the passage a little deeper and ask the questions:

Why did David do this?

How did David do this?

How did he give this kind of *hesed* mercy? There are two reasons.

One is that he has faith in God's bigger plan for his life. What I mean by that is that David has received *hesed*—in other words, his sins of committing adultery and then multiple murders that he arranged to cover up that adultery. The Bible is clear in the Old Testament that those are death sentences. And David is spared. He received mercy in his life. And he's able to see God's perspective, things that maybe other people can't see. He's able to see God's perspective on his life. His mind is able to see that God is working in his soul.

2 Samuel 16:10

But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’”

Let's read it again where it says, “But the king said, ‘What have I to do with you, sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, “Go curse David,” then who shall say, “Why have you done so?”” Listen to that value. In the midst of this suffering, plus all this humiliation in front of his mighty men, David is literally experiencing insult to injury. This is David being kicked when he is down in front of other people, and David's values are, *You know what? Maybe the Lord told him to do this? What? Maybe it's happening for a purpose.* He's looking at it as a means for God to change him or for him to learn something.

2 Samuel 16:11-12

Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn't this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it.”¹² And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today.”

Look what he says. “And then David said to Abishai and all of his servants, ‘My son, my own son, is trying to kill me right now. And doesn't this relative of Saul have even more reason

to do so? Leave him alone. Let him curse. For the Lord Jehovah has told him to do it.” He’s doing some math and theology in his head, and he says, “ ‘Perhaps Jehovah will see that I’m being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today.’ ”

In the vocabulary of our church, Grace Covenant Church, David knows this—and this is where his faith is, by the way. This is what he knows and has his faith in: that God’s ambition for him is to make him like Christ in all of life. And all of life is a means to that end. And sometimes—maybe, just maybe—the only way he can become like Christ in this particular part of his life is to be humiliated while he’s despairing and discouraged. *You know what you need, David? Insult upon injury.* And that’s how he sees life. He’s able to see what God is doing in his life.

There have been two times in my adult life when I have been reduced to very little. I was getting depressed, I was growing weary, I felt trapped with no way out, I almost quit and just left town and started over somewhere. In addition to that, I had some people come and take advantage of kicking me while I was down. And in all of that, I was just trying to make sense of it. And then my wife said to me, “Maybe this is the Lord’s doing. Maybe you’re surrounded by all of this failure and discouragement for a purpose. And maybe, perhaps, the Lord is seeing that you’ve been wronged and will bless you for these curses that you’ve received.” She had an objective view, a view from David’s heart.

David is able to do this, and the reason he does it is because he has a perspective on his own life from God. And the second reason is that he has faith in God’s bigger plan for justice. David is going to delegate the justice for Shimei to the Lord. He’ll let the Lord deal with that.

And you can see in the New Testament how it’s vivid and pronounced when Paul talks about this and how we’re supposed to respond. Let me read out of Romans chapter 12. It says it over and over again. “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Do not be proud.” David’s not proud. “Do not repay evil for evil. And if it’s possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men. Do not take revenge, my friends. You know it’s written, ‘Vengeance is mine,’ says the Lord. ‘I will repay.’ On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he’s thirsty, give him something to eat or drink.” Listen to this carefully. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Besides what is clearly being taught here, I want to emphasize that last sentence: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Paul is ironically using military words to explain this paradox. He’s using the word “overcome” here in the sense of “Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil.” He says, *Look, oh yeah, there’s a fight, sure. But don’t let the fight beat you; fight back with good.* In other words, don’t let the attack beat you down. Attack back. And how do you attack? With good. In other words, with the weapons of how it works, good is more powerful than evil, so do not be overcome and destroyed by evil, but rather destroy and overcome evil with good.

This is the relentless *hesed* love. It destroys evil. It has that kind of power. And we know that and we can live that because we have this kind of faith and this hope in delegating. “‘Vengeance is mine,’ saith the Lord. ‘I will repay.’”

So, in summary, David is able to do this. And the reason he is able to do it is because he has received this mercy, and because of that, he’s able to have a vision for what God is doing in his particular life. He can see things at a deeper level. And the other reason is that he just leaves the justice to God. “And perhaps the Lord will bless me because He’s watching all this cursing going on.”

The application for this week again is to see how this *hesed* mercy is part of the Christmas story. That’s why we’re studying it during our Christmas at Grace time. It’s what Christmas is all about. It’s part of the gift of God loving the world so much that He sent His only Son. And just like we said before, a person who has received the Gospel is to become the Gospel in other people’s lives. And if we’ve been gifted with this grace and this mercy, we are to give grace and mercy. And I think especially during the holiday seasons when we might be around people who we’re not typically around, or maybe with people like Shimei. We get to give mercy and withhold our anger because it’s been withheld from us.

Just think about the famous verses we’ve looked at—John 3:16-17, but now at a deeper level. “For God so loved the world that He gave”—that’s Christmas—“He gave His only Son, so that anyone”—anyone—“who would believe in Him would not perish”—*hesed* mercy—“but would receive a gift—*hesed* grace—”eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world”—*hesed* mercy—“but so that the world might be saved”—*hesed* grace—“through Him.” It’s everywhere. It’s the nature of salvation. It’s the nature of God.

So, every time I read this story I am cut to the quick. It's not been an easy week. Because the passage clearly shows us the heart of King David at what may quite literally be his lowest level. And then he's humiliated and mocked and falsely accused in front of his mighty men. And the theme is *Easy, Abishai. Let that Shimei go on and live. Put the sword down. It's not for you.*

And we're able to do that because we're able to release those people in our lives to the Lord, because God has done that in our lives. And who knows if the Lord's not using this to make us become like Christ in a different way, in a different aspect of our lives. Maybe the only way we can become like Christ, who is mocked and humiliated at His lowest point—when He's on the cross. And so, maybe we become like Christ by being like Christ and experiencing what He experienced. Maybe that's the only way to get there. Who knows? Perhaps ... that's what the passage says.

Hesed: there are nineteen English words to try and describe what this attribute of God is. We've seen loyal devotion that's undeserved. We've seen a covenant grace that's unmerited. And now we see this dependable mercy that's unjustified. That's what it looks like.

I think that sometimes mercy is one of the most difficult things to grasp unless you've experienced it—somebody withholding justice.

When the children were young, we were raising them and trying to help them understand the perspectives of salvation. And I think, again, grace and unmerited gifts are a little simpler to be able to demonstrate to them. But I remember Melinda and I were thinking, *How do we demonstrate mercy? How do we make this a concrete, experiential event for them?* And so, we just waited until that day came. And the day it came in my son's life is that he committed a crime that he could not pay for. When he was about five or six years old, he took a pocket knife that I had given him and he cut a hole in the comforter that Melinda's mom made just for him—this custom comforter from grandmother. He cut a hole in it with that knife.

And if you're thinking, why would I give a five-year-old a pocket knife, you should quit judging now, because you're missing the bigger point of the story. Because I've already heard about that, all right? I've heard about it plenty. I can't take it back. Can we go back to the story? We're talking about mercy here. We all live with regrets.

Melinda was lit up about this comforter being ruined. And I said, "Hey, this is it. He can't handle the wrath that you have for him. So, I'm going to step in and take it." So, we negotiated

with him. I said, “You can’t take this kind of justice. And so, this one time I’ll take your paddling. And Mom’s going to let me have it.”

And Melinda and I had a talk, and I said, “Hey, you can’t pull any punches, because there’s a lesson here. God doesn’t withhold His justice upon Jesus.”

And she said, “I’m ready.”

“Well ... okay.” She did not hold back. Kapow! And it made an impression on all of us. The first impression was on me, on my body. But I think another impression was made on our son, because he got to experience what John did at the cross, where he saw someone else be part of withholding the justice that he deserved. And he saw that mercy wasn’t free; it was expensive; it was costly. Not to him, but justice prevailed that day.

And then, honestly, I remember it regularly, because God so loved the world that He sent His only Son for me. And sure, He sent Him on Christmas Day to be born in a cave. But He sent Him to a cross that led to another cave that He vacated. But He sent Him there that He might take my wrath, that I might enjoy His mercy. He wanted to give me that mercy, but at His expense. So, I got a little taste of what it was like. It’s not free.

And so, occasionally when I think, *Not so fast, sons of thunder! Put your sword down, Abishai!* I think back about that time that I had one experience that was so small when compared to my salvation that comes through Christ and His death and proved by His resurrection. And I think, *You know what? That can change even a cold, cold heart like mine and make me like David, make me like Jesus.*

So, in our last application here, how about you? Do you need to become like Christ in mercy? Do you need to receive that mercy to become His child? And then the application is, if you received the Gospel, you be the Gospel. Is there someone to whom you need to give that kind of *hesed* mercy? This holiday season there is a lot of ministry all around us. There’s a Shimei coming to your home soon.

Let’s pray that we might have a greater grasp of this heart of King David, this heart of King Jesus, and become like Christ in mercy. Pray with me.

Lord, I’m thunderstruck by this story again and again. I can never recover from this. It’s such an honorable and revered man that is humiliated in his worst moment, and He receives it from you. Lord, I long that I would become more like that, the way You were mocked and

received, dishonored by scoundrels and Your lowest point, moments before You said the words, "It is finished."

Lord, I'd ask that You would help me help us become merciful, because You gave us mercy by receiving the Father's wrath. Lord, I'd ask that You would give us opportunities in days to come, that we might practice this kind of mercy, so that we might enjoy becoming and being like Christ in the lives around us; that we would be able to witness someone receiving this kindness, this hesed, this lovingkindness—they deserve justice and they receive grace, they receive mercy. Lord, I'd like You to arrange circumstances so that we could actually see that happen in a way that lives are changed because of it.

And we would give all the glory to You. We pray this as a church in Jesus' name. Amen.