

2 Samuel 16:15-19:8 | “God at Work”

Preached on November 6, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to 2 Samuel 16, verse 15 this morning, as we will be covering about 3 chapters today.

Since we will be covering so much, there will be times where I will summarize what is going on for you, and times where we will zoom in and read a section together. *[pauseeee]*

In a play there are more people at work than appear.

You have the actors and actresses on the stage, of course.

They are the ones who are visibly at work acting, but they aren't the only ones doing something during the play, are they?

You have people in the back, behind the scenes, who are directing people to where they need to be at the right time.

They are making sure that the actors have on the right costume and have the right prop. *[pause]*

You have people who come out when the lights go dark and move around the stage so that the scene is set for the next act.

And you have people working the lights and the sound. *[pause]*

You could say that if you didn't have those workers behind-the-scenes, then the play would flop.

What appears on the surface does not present the reality of what's *really* going on.

The actors and actresses aren't the only ones at work. *[pause]*

So likewise, as we study the chapters before us this morning, we notice the same sort of principle.

There are many people at work in these chapters, who are visibly doing things.

Yet there's Someone behind-the-scenes, who is at work, who is the One who is really driving everything - the Lord.

Let me show you how this truth is evident in the stories we will look at today. *[pauseeee]*

So Absalom has stolen the hearts of the people, and David has had to flee Jerusalem in order to protect himself and his kingship.

Absalom has with him David's old counselor, Ahithophel, and David has strategically sent back his top guys to spy and report on what's happening.

So Absalom at this point is in Jerusalem without David, and he has lots of power, but what will he do next to further secure his cause to be on the throne?

He asks what Ahithophel counsels, and let's listen in, as we READ verses 20-23 of chapter 16. *[READ 16:20-23]*

Ahithophel sees a great political opportunity in David's concubines, whom he left behind.¹
[pause]

You see, in those days, an attempt to be with the harem of the king was a sign of rebellion and a way to usurp a king.²

It was like saying, "I'm in control now."

And so for Absalom, it was his way of showing that he's in control, not David.

And also showing that he is totally against David, for he has made himself a stench to him.
[pause]

This is a political power play, in order to embolden the people to rebel against David. *[pauseeee]*

What Absalom does here is completely evil.

Yet is there more going on here than meets the eye? Certainly. *[pause]*

Think back to what God said to David after he sinned with Bathsheba and then killed Uriah.

He said, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun."³ *[pause]*

So what Absalom does is actually a fulfillment of God's prophecy against David.

And in that, we are taught the truth that...

I. God is at work fulfilling His promises....even unpleasant ones.

I want you to think about what happened here.

Ahithophel and Absalom plotted and did something evil, yet God was at work, using their evil plot to fulfill His Word. *[pauseeeee]*

What a God we have, whose Word always comes true.

¹ See 2 Samuel 15:16.

² Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed., 2 Sa 16:21). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ 2 Samuel 12:11.

It doesn't matter if evil men plot evil - His Word will come true. *[pause]*

This happened with Joseph, as his brothers plotted evil, but God used it for good.⁴

This happened at the Cross, where Jesus was killed by the hands of lawless men, but delivered up according to the plan of God.⁵ *[pause]*

Even when wicked people think they are succeeding, they are only succeeding in fulfilling the plan of God.

Though they rub their hands together in glee, they are only working right into the hand of God.

For ultimately, their plots will fail, just like the plot of Absalom and Ahithophel ultimately failed, for they lost in the end. *[pauseeee]*

The Lord always fulfills what He Himself promises.

So you can trust His Word, no matter what it is!

Remember His promises: may they be your constant companion in sickness and in health, in trial and in ease, in lack and in prosperity. *[pauseeeee]*

Continuing on in our text this morning, we discover more.

If you remember, David has his friend, Hushai, sent back to Jerusalem in order to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.

Absalom sees Hushai and is confused as to why he's there and not with David, but Hushai convinces him that he's loyal. *[pause]*

This is an important part, for as we shall see in chapter 17, Hushai's role will change the course of the story.

For when you get over to chapter 17 - Absalom wants to know what to do next in regards to David, so he seeks out the counsel of Ahithophel. *[pauseeee]*

Ahithophel has this great plan of taking 12,000 men and pursuing David right away.

He would catch them off guard while they were tired, and kill only David, so that the rest of the people would come under Absalom. *[pause]*

This plan sounds good to Absalom and the elders of Israel.

But Absalom does something surprising - he wants to hear from Hushai as to what *he* thinks they should do. *[pause]*

⁴ See Genesis 50:20.

⁵ See Acts 2:23.

Absalom tells Hushai what Ahithophel's plan was, and then asks what he thinks. *[pause]*

For Hushai, he uses this opportunity to his advantage.

His plan deceives Absalom for what Hushai does is he feeds the ego of Absalom.

In his plan: Absalom would be the leader taking all of Israel into battle with this massive army to squash David and his smaller force. *[pause]*

He also feeds into Absalom's fear, for he reminds him of David's expertise in war, and might in battle.

And thirdly, his plan convinces him of certain victory, for how could he lose with such a massive force? *[pause]*

But really, this plan is just what is needed for David, for it means that David gets more time to regroup and position himself better, and Hushai knows that.

And in an amazing turn of events, Absalom and the elders listen to Hushai's counsel, deeming it better than Ahithophel's.

And in the end, Ahithophel's counsel is defeated. *[pause]*

What does this remind us of?

Back in chapter 15, when David hears of Ahithophel joining Absalom, David prays to God saying, "O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."⁶

That's when God works and sends Hushai to him and David sends him back to Jerusalem. *[pause]*

What do we see here but that...

II. God is at work answering prayers.

David had prayed that Ahithophel's counsel would be turned into foolishness, and God turned it into foolishness by causing Absalom to consider it foolish. *[pause]*

I want you to think about how big of a prayer request and answer to prayer this was!

Ahithophel was this highly esteemed counselor, whose counsel was as if one had consulted the word of God.⁷

Yet here is Absalom not following his advice, and choosing to go with someone who was loyal to David. *[pause]*

⁶ 2 Samuel 15:31.

⁷ See 2 Samuel 16:23.

This turn of events *seemed* impossible, yet it happened!

But this reminds us that God can answer impossible-seeming requests! [pause]

When David prayed for Ahithophel's counsel to be turned to foolishness, he knew how from an earthly standpoint this was impossible, for his counsel was so good and respected.

Yet from God's standpoint, it was an easy request to answer. [pause]

You think that was hard for God?

He created the world, don't you think He could do it?

He can move mountains, don't you think He could defeat someone's counsel? [pause]

The Lord can do what seems impossible, for nothing is impossible for Him.

He "brings the counsel of the nations to nothing."⁸

He thwarts human, worldly wisdom.

Even through the Cross, he "made foolish the wisdom of the world."⁹ [pauseeeee]

Oh, how high we view the wisdom of this world, and how low we often view God's wisdom.

How high we view the impossible-seeming situations of life, and how low we view God's power to answer prayer! [pause]

Bring all of your requests to him, no matter how big or small!

Lay them at the feet of the One who can do the impossible, for He is at work answering prayers.

So let's ask, seek, and knock!¹⁰

If it is in accordance with His will, He will do it, and nothing can stay His hand. [pauseeeee]

As we work further in these chapters, we see what happens next.

Verse 14 gives us a key to understanding what just happened, so let's start reading there. [**READ** 17:14-20]

By giving us verse 14, telling us that God ordained this to bring harm upon Absalom, the narrator has keyed us into how to interpret the chapters in front of us, showing us that...

III. God is at work in the details. (17:1-29)

⁸ Psalm 33:10.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:20.

¹⁰ See Matthew 7:7.

God was at work in getting Hushai to be allowed around Absalom, and God was at work in getting Absalom to listen to his counsel.

Even as Hushai gets the information out to David, the messengers are almost found, but God makes it so that they are hidden in a well. *[pause]*

David is told what the plans are, and he's able to move quickly to a better position.

Verse 22 highlights that, "By daybreak not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan." *[pause]*

Ahithophel then hangs himself when he hears his advice isn't taken, probably because he knows that David will win now, and he is a goner anyway.

Then the armies position themselves for battle.

And the last section of chapter 17 shows us even further of God at work, for He provides David with more provisions.

Three wealthy men come and bring him in verse 28, "beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds and sheep and cheese." *[pauseeee]*

God was at work in the details!

Sometimes His work is quiet and behind-the-scenes when you don't even know it. *[pause]*

David didn't know what was going on in the court of Absalom, but God was at work.

And we must not forget that God often works quietly in the little unseen details. *[pause]*

You may not know all of the details going on right now, but God is working something behind-the-scenes that will impact your life in the future.

He's doing so many things, and we are only aware of a sliver of them. *[pause]*

So how do we respond to something like that?

We don't have to live in agony, fretting over the fact that we don't know what He's doing.

Rather, we live in confidence that our God *is* working in the details, and in that we can rest assured. *[pause]*

We don't have to fear because nothing is outside of His control.

Nothing will get past Him and surprise Him. *[pauseeee]*

So God's working is sometimes quiet and behind-the-scenes, but other times it's seen in evident, even dramatic ways...

The two men who were to convey the message to David are almost captured, and if they were captured, the whole thing would have fallen apart.

But what happens?

They just barely make it out undiscovered by the skin of their teeth, as there so happens to be a man supportive of David nearby, who so happens to have a well they can hide in.

To the world, that sounds like coincidence, but to us, that sounds like providence. *[pauseeee]*

David's army is able to move quickly out of the area and into a better position, so that no man is left behind.

Was that because of their quickness of feet or God's providentially timing?

Verse 14 gave us the answer, for if God wants not one man left behind, not one man will be left behind. *[pauseeee]*

You know, often in our minds, we wonder, why doesn't God work in easy, clear-cut ways?

Why didn't the message just easily go to the messengers, who just easily passed the message to David?

Because sometimes God works in ways where people just make it, while hiding in a well with the pursuer right above them. *[pause]*

He loves to work in ways where "just in the nick of time" deliverance comes.

Just at the right moment, the money comes in.

Just barely, you miss that car crash.

Why? Because in the dramatic, just barely, just in the nick of time moments, you clearly see: God is at work. *[pause]*

When it looked like it would fail, God came through to show His power, and we are once again confronted with the glory of God's providence. *[pauseeee]*

We even see this with God providing at the right time for David in giving his abundant provisions from those 3 wealthy men.

He provides for our needs when we need them. *[pauseeee]*

Why do we worry so much?

Why do we doubt God's provision?

Why do we distrust the God of all power, wisdom, and strength, who has come through time and time again? *[pauseeee]*

God is at work in the details: what a calming, healing balm for a troubled soul. *[pauseeeee]*

We now move into chapter 18.

The scene is set: Absalom's army is amassed and ready to fight, and so is David's army.

In fact, David divides his force into three, with a leader over each.

David then says that he wants to go out and fight, but his men say not to go because they know that David is really the main target of Absalom.

And before the army goes out to fight, David tells his generals so that all can hear, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom."

That's important for the rest of the story. *[pauseeee]*

So the two armies battle each other in the forest, and David's men win the battle, as their three divisions and the conditions of the forest help them.

And then Absalom happens to meet the servants of David, and just listen in to what happens, as we start reading in verse 9 of chapter 18. *[READ 18:9-15]*

The battle is called off by Joab, for Absalom has finally met his demise.

The popular, "great-in-his-own-eyes" Absalom gets stuck in a tree and can't get free, and he's easily killed.

And all that's left of Absalom is a heap of rocks, covering his grave in the forest, and a monument that he created for himself, only displaying that his line didn't continue. *[pauseeee]*

But how will David respond to this news?

Remember, he told the commanders to deal gently with Absalom. *[pause]*

Well first, the news needs to get to him somehow.

Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, who was one of ones who hid in the well previously with the message for David, wants to take the news.

But Joab doesn't want him to go because he knows David might react badly to this news of Absalom, and he gets a Cushite to take the news.

But Ahimaaz persists in asking, willing to take the risks, and Joab allows him to go. *[pause]*

Ahimaaz runs faster than the Cushite to David, and David hears of these messengers running to him, and he tries to convince himself that it's good news. *[pauseeee]*

Ahimaaz gets there first and tells him of the victory, and David asks how Absalom is and Ahimaaz hides the truth and just says that he didn't see what happened.

That's when the Cushite arrives with the news and David learns the truth of what happened to Absalom. *[pause]*

David then goes away from the people and cries, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!" *[pauseeeee]*

As you look at how this section is written, you vividly see the sorrow of David.

He cries out because of the loss of his son, and it just reminds us of the sorrow of sin. *[pause]*

Sin brings great sadness, as we experience the consequences of it.

Not only was Absalom's sin involved here, but David probably thinks about some things that he did which led to this...

Instead of punishing Amnon, David lets it go, and so Absalom took matters into his own hands.

Instead of dealing with Absalom, David lets it go, and then even annoys Absalom more by not letting him into his presence.

It was his sin that led God to promise the sword to not depart from his house.¹¹ *[pauseeee]*

What happened to Absalom really tore up David, but Joab hears about this, and goes straight to David to snap him out of it.

Just listen to what he says in chapter 19, verse 5...*[READ 19:5-8]*

Joab's point was that this was a great victory, and David's men essentially won it for him, yet he's not grateful for them.

Instead, he's causing them to act like they lost. *[pause]*

By doing this, David was treating his men horribly, and this would cause his men to not want to follow him anymore.

So Joab convinces David to go out and speak to the men so as to fix the situation, and David does. *[pauseeee]*

Though David was in mourning, what happened here was truly a victory that God gave, showing us that...

¹¹ See 2 Samuel 12:10.

IV. God is at work on behalf of His people! (18:1-19:8)

David was the rightful, God-appointed king and so to go against David was to be an enemy of God.

That's what Absalom became by trying to usurp David.

And what does God do? He brings him down.

As the Cushite messenger accurately said, "The Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." *[pause]*

This is because God is at work on behalf of His people - He will not let His people be destroyed. *[pauseeee]*

Absalom proudly thought that because he put together a massive army of all of Israel behind him that he would be victorious.

But God showed once again that human power is weak compared to His might. *[pause]*

He brings down human power, and even used nature to do His bidding with the forest devouring many men. *[pause]*

Haughty Ahithophel and Absalom thought that David had no chance and it seemed like they were the ones in control, but by the end, they were both hanging. *[pauseeee]*

Though on all appearances, Absalom's force was bigger and stronger, they didn't have God on their side.

And any enemy who tries to destroy God's chosen One, His kingdom, or His people are thrown down - just read the book of Revelation. *[pause]*

God's will prevails.

Absalom's doesn't, and even David's doesn't - but God's does, and that's great news considering it's the all-wise, all-knowing, all-good God. *[pauseeee]*

What a God we serve, who works on behalf of His people, the church!

"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it"¹² *[pause]*

No matter how big the enemy looks.

No matter how intimidating they seem, and how many resources they have - God will not let His church be destroyed. *[pause]*

¹² Matthew 16:18.

What a reassuring truth that we are on the side of victory!

We don't need to go through life in dread, for though the world may appear to win small battles, it won't win the war. *[pauseeee]*

Lay all of your fears and worries at the feet of the Mighty King, who works on our behalf.

He will ultimately deliver, make all things right, and usher us into Heaven to be with Him forever, where there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.¹³ *[pauseeee]*

Let's always remember that...

God is in control, and His kingdom will prevail!

You know, sometimes you see those signs that say, "Caution: Men at Work".

Well for us, as we look at a passage like this - the sign on display says rather, "Comfort: God at Work". *[pause]*

God's sovereignty and providence aren't a caution for us who trust in Him, but a comfort.

And this God who we trust in didn't just work back in David's day.

But He worked, in the greatest act of love, by sending Jesus Christ to this world to live and then die for our sin. *[pause]*

Jesus did the work for us because our works could never save.

He lived the perfect life that we couldn't.

He died the death that we deserved, and rose again the third day. *[pause]*

He worked on our behalf, securing for us forgiveness and eternal life.

And even now He works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.¹⁴

And for those of us who love God, He is working all things together for good.¹⁵ *[pause]*

Always remember: God is in control, and His kingdom *will* prevail.

¹³ See Revelation 21:4.

¹⁴ See Philippians 2:13.

¹⁵ See Romans 8:28.