

A Root of Bitterness – 2 Samuel 17:23

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Hebrews 12:14-15

1. The author of Hebrews urges us to remember the followers of Jesus are *supposed to be* a close-knit community where we're responsible for one another.
2. We **ARE** our brother's keeper, watching out for & taking care of one another.
3. He says –

Hebrews 12:14-15

4. There's a lot there but only one thing I want to focus on this morning –
 - a. We must be on the lookout, it says, for "any root of bitterness."
 - b. It's a **root** – something unseen, hidden, repressed, private, stuffed;
 - c. And though unseen, it nevertheless *feeds our soul, informs our mind, fuels our motives.*
 - d. But it's a **bitter** root; so it poisons us & all we touch.
5. We must stay on the lookout for **any** root of bitterness because left unchecked; it'll spring up into a noxious weed spreading death & destruction.

B. Example of that Today

II. AHITHOPHEL'S FALL

A. Set the Scene

1. David's adultery with Bathsheba along with the murder of her husband set in motion a series of troubling reactions within David's family.
2. Like a line of dominoes they fall one after another bringing pain & sorrow to *thousands*.
3. It begins when David's firstborn son **Amnon**, raped his half-sister Tamar.
 - a. Her full-brother **Absalom** used her misfortune as an **excuse** to kill Amnon because he stood in Absalom's ambition, to take the throne.
 - b. After 3 years of exile, Absalom returned home & was reconciled to his father.
 - c. But he wasn't content to wait for David's death before ascending the throne.
 - d. He wanted it **now** & made moves to take it by campaigning for the hearts of the people.

15:1-6

4. Absalom was an unbelievably good looking man others **wanted** to like so he was able to quickly gather a huge base of supporters.

14:25

5. When he deemed the time was right & the majority was with him, he staged a coup.

B. Fleeing Jerusalem

15:7-9

1. Rebellious kids have used religious god-talk to fool their godly parents for centuries.
 - a. A believing Mom or Dad wants to see the adult children walking with the Lord so when they say they're going to church *on their own*, it's a happy day.
 - b. Little do they know Junior's not going to church; he's going out with his friends to something decidedly un-church-like.
 - c. And so it was with Absalom – he wasn't going to pay a vow; he was going to start a rebellion against his Father.
2. As Absalom's force approached Jerusalem, David fled with his remaining loyal followers.

15:30-31

3. As they were making their way up the side of the Mt. of Olives there on the east side of Jerusalem, there was a lot of discussion about the *how & why* of Absalom's revolt.
4. A list was compiled of the officials who'd sided with Absalom; someone mentioned *Ahithophel*.
 - a. He'd been one of David's *closest friends & confidants*.
 - b. A good part of David's success as a leader was due to his skill at selecting good people to surround & assist him.
 - c. Ahithophel had been one of David's most important counselors, a man whose wisdom was unparalleled.

d. In **16:23** we read –

5. It was devastating to hear Ahithophel was a turncoat.
6. **Psalm 55:12-14** convey David's grief over Ahithophel's betrayal.
7. As David had betrayed his loyal friend Uriah, he now tastes the bitter cup of betrayal by a friend.
8. And he's scared because with men like Ahithophel backing Absalom, there's little chance of David's coming out of this alive.
9. So he asks God to thwart Ahithophel's influence. God brings an immediate answer.

15:32-34

10. It becomes Hushai's mission to counter whatever counsel Ahithophel gives Absalom & to send reports to David on the sly.
 - a. He goes back & is quizzed by Absalom on why he didn't follow David.
 - b. Hushai says he doesn't serve *David*, he serves *the king*, & that's Absalom now.

C. Ahithophel's Counsel

1. Once Absalom entered Jerusalem, he asked Ahithophel what he should do first.
 - a. Ahithophel said he needed to secure the unswerving loyalty of his soldiers by *quenching* any chance of reconciliation with his father.

The message needed to be sent that Absalom's not going to feel sympathy for his old man & return the throne to him.

- b. The best way to do that would be to publicly take over his father's royal *harem*.
- c. Absalom did just that; letting everyone know he'd burned his bridges with Pops – there could be no reconciliation.
- d. This rebellion can only end one way → with the death of either David or Absalom.

2. **Ahithophel's determined** it's going to be David.

17:1-4

3. Take careful note of Ahithophel's desire to lead the final assault on David *personally*.
 - a. He wasn't interested in killing all David's followers, even though they'd present an on-going threat to the rebels.
 - b. Ahithophel wanted to kill *only one guy* – **David!**
 - c. What's unusual about this is that Ahithophel *wasn't a warrior*.
 - d. He was an advisor, a wise man, a sage – *not a soldier*.
 - e. Yet he wanted to *lead* the attack on David and *do the deed* → *himself*.
 - f. Why? What's going on with Ahithophel that he's so far out of character here? Hang on!

17:5-7

4. When Hushai heard Ahithophel's counsel he knew it was the *right course* for Absalom to take, but if he did, David's done for.
 - a. So he carefully suggested the usually brilliant Ahithophel had failed to consider one very important factor –
 - b. That David & his men would be furious at this rebellion; like a bear robbed of her cubs.
 - c. They may be few, but they were *mighty men of war* & their anger would be a fury fearsome to face in battle.
5. Hushai then appealed to Absalom's vanity & lust for glory by advising they wait till the *entire army* of Israel can be rallied, then **Absalom himself** can lead the attack.
6. This *appealed* to Absalom & his assistants, so they *rejected* Ahithophel's counsel & went with Hushai's plan.

17:14

7. Hushai then sent a secret message telling David as quick as he could he needed to hide in the hills on the other side of the Jordan.

D. Bitterness

17:23

1. Ahithophel went home, set his house in order for his family's sake, then committed suicide.
2. What's going on here? Why would such a seemingly *minor* thing drive Ahithophel to such *drastic* action?
3. Was he a sore loser? Was he on some kind of power hungry kick with

- an ego so big he couldn't stand losing to Hushai?
4. At first blush Ahithophel looks like the kid who because he doesn't get to bat first quits the game & takes the ball home with him.
 5. But as we dig into his story we realize that's not the reason for his suicide. It's much deeper & more troubling.
 6. Ahithophel was a ***bitter man*** who threw in his lot with Absalom **for one reason**—to ***get back*** at David; to exact ***revenge***.
 7. Though they'd been friends, Ahithophel now ***hated*** David & ***ached*** to destroy him. That's why he was so eager to press the final attack ***personally***.
 8. But when Absalom preferred the folly of Hushai's plan to the wisdom of ***his*** counsel, he realized he'd thrown in his lot with a fool & the rebellion was doomed.
 9. So he went home, put his affairs in order, and killed himself.
 10. **Why?** What had happened to drive this bitter wedge between these one-time friends?

11. Look at 15:12 –

- a. When Absalom ***first*** contacted Ahithophel, he wasn't living at court, offering his counsel to David; he was home, miles away.
 - b. Absalom ***knew*** Ahithophel was ***ready to join*** a rebellion. How did he know?
12. The answer is found in one of those ***dreaded genealogies*** people are so loath to read when they study the Bible.
 - a. Ch. 23 is a list of David's mighty men.
 - b. In v. 34 we read of ***Eliam***, the ***son*** of Ahithophel. Who was Eliam the ***father*** of? ***Bathsheba!***
 - c. Look at v. 39. ***Uriah*** was one of David's mighty men.
 - d. Eliam & Uriah had ***served together***. Eliam had such admiration for Uriah he knew he'd make a great husband for his daughter & the arrangements were made.
 13. But one day Ahithophel heard the rumors going round the palace about David's adultery with his granddaughter & the conspiracy to kill her husband.
 - a. In that moment, David became his mortal enemy.
 - b. David betrayed not only Uriah, but Ahithophel as well.
 - c. So he packed up his stuff & returned to Giloh.
 14. There he sat for ***10 years!*** nursing his hurt, hatred, & bitterness; longing for some way to get back at David.
 15. Then the message came from Absalom & Ahithophel saw his chance.
 16. It all went along smoothly until Absalom made the fateful decision to listen to Hushai instead of Ahithophel.
 - a. In that moment, Ahithophel knew the rebellion was doomed & his chance to get even with David was a lost cause.
 - b. As he'd earlier surmised, there was only one way this thing could end; with the death of either Absalom or David.
 - c. Now it was clear Absalom would be the loser; Ahithophel would go

down with him.

d. So he went home, & ended it himself.

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17. Ahithophel was bitter over David's betrayal & sins against his family.
- He thought the king had gotten away with them & was living without consequences.
 - Because he'd packed up & gone back to Giloh, he had no idea how God had *already* dealt with David.
 - How Nathan had confronted him & David had broken so *completely* before God.
 - Because their friendship ended, Ahithophel had never seen David's spiritual agony & remorse.
 - He didn't know of David's forgiveness by God.
 - He knew nothing about the week David fasted & spent on his face before God pleading for the life of his child while the palace staff feared he'd take his own life, he was so grief stricken.
18. If Ahithophel had witnessed *any* of this torment David knew it may have cooled the fires of his hate.
19. But Ahithophel stayed in Giloh, *oblivious* to David's conviction & restoration to God.
20. The flames of anger slowly burned down to become smoldering embers of bitterness that twisted the once great wise man into a *little man bent on one thing* – Making David Pay!
21. When he saw those plans slipping away, there was nothing left to live for, and killed himself.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Not the End

- But this was *not* the end.
- Ahithophel had said to Absalom, "I will kill *just* David."
- Know this Ahithophel! The rebellion you helped start, will fail at what you aimed at accomplishing, but not before *thousands* will *pay* for *your* bitterness & hate.
- In 18:7, we learn 20,000 fall in the battle between David & Absalom. *20,000!*
- How many fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, sons & daughters will *each one* of those 20,000 leave to become the soil the seeds of Ahithophel's bitterness drop in to? How many *more Ahithophels* will his bitterness produce?

B. The Root of Bitterness

Heb 12:15 - looking carefully . . . lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.

- Ahithophel's root of bitterness remained unseen *for a decade*.
- But it kept growing as he daily watered it with dreams of revenge.
- Then one day it sprouted & became a huge tree that dropped rotten fruit poisoning thousands of lives.
- Long before Ahithophel committed suicide, his *spirit* shriveled & died

because he refused to forgive.

5. And it was all so pointless because David *had already been dealt with by God*.

C. Ephesians 4

Vs. 26-27

1. As we go through life, we're going to be hurt & offended and get angry as a result.
2. We must never let that anger drive us to sin, either the sin of lashing out *right away* –
3. Or the more *subtle* sin of *stuffing our anger* & turning it to a *hate* that slowly morphs into *bitterness*, and provides a beachhead in our soul for the devil to work death.
4. Before the day passes, we need to take our hurts to God for His healing touch & the grace to let go of the *right* & desire to get even.

Vs. 31-32

5. How were we forgiven? *Completely!* That's the way *we* must forgive.
6. Now, let me make something clear – *forgiveness* is not the same as *reconciliation*.
 - a. *Forgiveness* means letting go of the *right* to get even.
 - b. *Reconciliation* means returning the relationship to friendship.
 - c. If someone *refuses* to be friendly, we can't *pretend* everything's hunky-dory.
 - d. But we *have to* let go of the *desire* to make them pay.

D. Any

1. The writer of Hebrews calls us to a careful inspection of our hearts to see if there's ANY root of bitterness growing within us.
2. The most common kind of grass around here is Cacooya. It's just a nasty kind of grass because you can't keep it out of the flower beds.
 - a. You can put a border between lawn & bed and it just grows underneath it.
 - b. I've found grass growing in my front flower bed over 2 feet away from the lawn.
 - c. When I dig it out, there's a runner several inches down tracing all the way back to the lawn!
3. That's what bitterness & unforgiveness does – it can remain hidden for years as we harbor a sense of being wronged & hold on to the hope of getting even.
4. If we don't put some Spiritual *Round-up* on it by forgiving & letting go of our desire for revenge, that bitterness will *out* one day & work great harm.
5. Heed the call of the Spirit today – is there ANY root of bitterness – Any at all?
6. Some here today know there is, but feel *justified* in their enmity toward someone.
7. Hear it again – “Look carefully, lest there be ANY root of bitterness.”

A cop pulled a guy over for rolling a Stop. The driver asked
“What’d I do?”

The officer said, “You failed to stop back there.”

The driver said, “I *slowed down* didn’t I? What’s the difference?”

The cop pulled out his night stick & commended to beat the guy.

As he was swinging away he said, “Would you like me to *stop*
or *slow down*?”

8. God doesn’t call us to forgive *most* stuff – it’s *all* of it.
9. He doesn’t tell us to watch out for *most* bitterness, but *any*!
10. Here’s some cookies I made yesterday.
 - a. Now, I have to tell you, I put some rat poison in the batter; not much, just a smidgen. Maybe 2% of the total mixture.
 - b. Want one? Why not; the poison’s such a small part compared to the whole.
 - c. You know it isn’t the *amount* that matters – it’s the presence of **ANY** that makes them dangerous.
11. You & I are cookies, & bitterness is rat poison.
12. The only antidote to the poison of bitterness is to remember the greatness of *our* forgiveness through Christ.