

Sermon Text (2 Samuel 16:5–14 ESV)

⁵ When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually. 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.”

⁹ Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.” 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?’” ¹¹ And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. ¹² It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today.” ¹³ So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust. ¹⁴ And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself.

Jesus Gives Us the Gift of Forgiveness

David’s life was at risk. During the reign of King Saul, Saul’s sins had resulted in God rejecting him as king and selecting a new king who was after his own heart. That new king was David. Saul felt threatened by David, and so, he began to try to kill him. David was forced to flee from Saul, and, while he was on the run, he was given not one, but two opportunities to take Saul’s life. However, David spared Saul each time. Even though he had already been anointed as the next king of Israel, and even though there was no guarantee that Saul wouldn’t keep hunting him if he spared his life, David understood that Saul was still God’s anointed, and he left his fate in God’s hands. Eventually, Saul did lose his life, not by the hand of David, but by his own hand.

It seemed as though David’s days of running were finally over. And they were, for a time. However, during his own reign, his son, Absalom, conspired against him. He turned the hearts of the men of Israel against his father, David. And so, “David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, ‘Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go

quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword” (2 Samuel 15:14). David was on the run once again.

All of this was already bad enough, but now, David had an encounter with a distant relative of Saul named Shimei. Shimei came out to David and began to curse him, and this was not something that he did once, after which he returned home. Shimei cursed David continually, following him as he made his way to the Jordan River. Additionally, Shimei threw stones at David, which symbolized that David should be stoned for murder. What was this murder that Shimei was accusing David of and cursing him for? He said, “The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned” (verse 8). This could mean that Shimei held David responsible for all of the blood that was shed in the house of Saul. After all, after Saul died and David was anointed king of Judah, he went to war against the house of Saul for a long time. However, Shimei could have also been accusing David of murdering Saul and stealing his throne. If this was what Shimei was doing, it simply wasn’t true, as was already stated. Even if what Shimei said was true, he was still sinning by cursing the king, something was forbidden by law. As it says in the book of Exodus, “You shall not . . . curse a ruler of your people” (Exodus 22:28).

How would you react if you were in King David’s situation? If you were walking down the street and someone started to curse you or say false things about you, would you ignore him and keep on walking, or would you do something about it? And, if you decided to do something about it, would you simply point out where he was wrong, or would you start cursing right back at him? Would you stop at words, or would you get into a fight with him? And what if that person was throwing things at you? Would you just ignore him if what he was throwing at you wasn’t hurting you, would you try to get away from him, or would you retaliate and start throwing things back at him?

We may feel justified in the ways that we lash out against those who offend us or pick a fight with us, be they with our words or with our actions. However, what is all too often the reason for our retaliations? It is sinful anger. Jesus warns us about anger in our gospel lesson for today. He says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:21–22). The apostle John puts it another way in his first letter. He says, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15). We may think that our anger is righteous, and it may be, at first. But it is easier for our anger to become sinful than we think, especially when we still have a sinful nature living inside us.

If you were in King David’s situation, you may find yourself acting more like Abishai did, who said to David, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head” (verse 9). However, how does David actually react in his situation? David says, “Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today” (verses 11–12).

God had already sent David afflictions. Absalom’s rebellion was one of them. Therefore, David viewed what was happening to him as another affliction that was sent by God. He still thought that God could turn this situation into an immediate blessing, but, even if he didn’t, David still trusted that God’s good purpose would eventually be accomplished. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Actively choosing not to retaliate in anger against those who curse us, lie about us, or assault us might seem a strange and impossible task, but there is someone else who accomplished this task: Jesus Christ. The lies that were told about Jesus by the religious authorities, in addition to them turning the hearts of the people against Jesus, resulted in Jesus getting sentenced to death on a cross. As Jesus hung on that cross, he was mocked and derided by those who were watching and those who were passing by. “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40). “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:42–43). Jesus could have lashed out in anger against all of these people. He could have thrown insults right back at them while telling them why they’re all wrong and are going to hell. He could have called down lightning from heaven to smite them. But he didn’t. Instead, he said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Forgiving those who curse you instead of retaliating in sinful anger is no easy task, but that is exactly what Jesus did for you. You cursed Jesus with your sin. Your sin was placed on Jesus’ shoulders, and he carried them all the way to the cross as though they were his own. As he hung on the cross, God’s anger was directed at him, and this was not the sinful anger that we are all too familiar with. This was righteous anger, righteous anger that was directed at Jesus when it rightfully should have been directed at you. However, Jesus willingly suffered God’s wrath so that you would not have to, and it was through that suffering that God’s good purpose for you was accomplished: freeing you from the curse of your sin and forgiving you.

Now, resisting the temptation to give in to our sinful anger, a task that once seemed impossible, suddenly seems more doable, for it is not done for our own benefit but out of thanks for all that Jesus has done for us. We still will not be able to perfectly resist our desire to retaliate against others in sinful anger, but we have comfort in knowing that we have a Savior who has won us forgiveness for all of the times that we fall short, forgiveness that never runs out. Knowing that this gift of forgiveness is ours is what gave David strength when faced with affliction, and it is what gives us strength in the face of affliction today. Thanks be to God that he has given such a gift to us.