



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Lessons from the Life of David

2 Samuel 17

“Divine Action in the Minds of Men”

TRANSCRIPT

Turning to 2 Samuel chapter 17 for our Scripture reading. And for the sake of time this morning, I'm going to read simply the first 23 verses of the chapter. The last 6 verses do not bear too directly upon the message. But, of course, I recommend that you go on and read those verses as well. Chapter 17 in verse 1, and for those of you who may be here for the first time, we are studying the life of David and David, now, his throne. The rebellion has been, so far, successful, and David has had to flee. And so he is on his way to the east, toward the river Jordan, and now Absalom, Ahithophel and those associated with him, face the decision of what to do now because David is, of course, still alive. He still has a number of his famous warriors with him. And so, consequently, we are in the midst of a campaign that has great significance for the history of David and, actually, for the history of the biblical record.

So in chapter 17 in verse 1, we read.

“Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, ‘Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will

strike only the king. Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace.’ And the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel. Then Absalom said, ‘Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he says too.’”

Now, the Bible doesn’t tell us a whole lot about Hushai except that he was a companion of David and an advisor of David, a close friend of David. But here he begins one of the most remarkable speeches, impromptu, on the spur of the moment that is really found in the Bible. And I’d like for you to carefully note it and, after you leave this morning, go home and read it a bit more and you’ll appreciate what God was able to do through this man, at that time.

“Then Absalom said, ‘Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he says too. And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom spoke to him, saying, ‘Ahithophel has spoken in this manner. Shall we do as he says? If not, speak up.’ So Hushai said to Absalom, ‘The advice that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time. ‘For,’ said Hushai, ‘you know your father and his men, that they are mighty men, and they are enraged in their minds, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field; and your father is a man of war, and will not camp with the people. Surely by now he is hidden in some pit or in some other place. And it will be, when some of them are overthrown at the first, that whoever hears it will say, ‘There is a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.’”

Now, what he is simply saying is that when news comes of people being slaughtered, the chances are that someone may say that David’s men have started a slaughter of Absalom’s men, and that will, of course, destroy the rebellion right at that point.

“Surely by now he is hidden in some pit, or in some other place. And it will be, when some of them are overthrown at the first, that whoever hears it will say, ‘There is a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.’ And even he who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt completely. For all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and those who are with him are valiant men. Therefore, I advise that all Israel be fully gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, like the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. So we will come upon him in some place where he may be found, and we will fall on him as the dew falls on the ground.”

Incidentally, you’ll notice as we go along that there are a number of metaphors and similes, and also he is a bit vague in what he is suggesting. He uses constantly the term “some” and he is in a sense fighting for the life of David, for he wants delay.

“And of him and all the men who are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he has withdrawn into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city; and we will pull it into the river, until there is not one small stone found there.” So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, ‘The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel.’ For the Lord had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring disaster on Absalom. Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, [You remember, they were left in the city in order to keep David apprised of what was happening in the city.] ‘Thus and so Ahithophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and so I have advised. Now therefore, send quickly and tell David, saying, ‘Do not spend this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily cross over, [He means cross over the Jordan] lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up.’

Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed at En Rogel, for they dared not be seen coming into the city; so a female servant would come and tell them, and they would go and tell King David.”

Those of you that are reading the Authorized Version, she is called a wench in the Authorized Version, but female servant is really what she was. And the questionable connotations of our English term “wench” does not really apply to her. In fact, she is really a saint, as is evident from this account, one of God’s people to do his tasks, it turns out.

“Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom. But both of them went away quickly and came to a man’s house in Bahurim, who had a well in his court; and they went down into it. Then the woman took and spread a covering over the well’s mouth, and spread ground grain on it; and the thing was not known. And when Absalom’s servants came to the woman at the house, they said, ‘Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?’ So the woman said to them, ‘They have gone over the water brook.’ [You cannot help but remember Rehab, who at one point lied for the sake of the Israelites, and this woman is doing the same.] And when they had searched and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem. Now it came to pass, after they had departed, that they came up out of the well and went and told King David, and said to David, ‘Arise and cross over the water quickly. For thus has Ahithophel advised against you.’ So David and all the people who were with him arose and crossed over the Jordan. By morning light not one of them was left who had not gone over the Jordan. Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, [I guess that means arranged for matters after his death, probably to be sure his will was there and among other things, and having arranged things] and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father’s tomb.”

And we'll stop with that text. May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's look to him in prayer now.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for the Scriptures, which are the word of God and which so marvelously express the will of God in so many circumstances, designed to teach us the truth concerning Thee, concerning our Triune God, and concerning the kind of life that is pleasing to Thee. We thank Thee for the Scriptures and we acknowledge, Lord, that they are the only rule of faith and practice. Help us to bear that in mind and help us, Lord, to constantly search them and, by Thy grace, bring our lives into conformity to the light that is found in Holy Scripture.

We give Thee thanks today for this beautiful day that Thou hast given to us. We give Thee thanks for the gift of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the ministry that he has accomplished for us in dying for our sins, we thank Thee for the Holy Spirit who instructs us in the things of the Lord, who touches our heart, who gives us new life in the new birth and who then undertakes to guide and direct us in our Christian living. We are surely blessed, Lord, and today we praise Thy Name and give Thee thanks.

We pray for this country of which we are a part, we pray for the whole Church of Jesus Christ, wherever the Lord Jesus is lifted up as the Son of God and Savior of men, may that word be used to the conversion of sinners and to the strengthening of the saints. And we pray for Believers Chapel, we ask Thy blessing upon our elders and deacons, and the members and friends, and especially the visitors who are here today. We bring them to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon them.

For the sick who have requested our prayers, we also pray. We know, Lord, something of the trials and troubles and the stresses and the strains of illness. And we commit them to Thee and we pray, Lord, that out of the comfort and consolation which Thou alone art able to give, that Thou will strengthen and enable those who are suffering

to have peace in their hearts as they recognize that when in the hands of our great Triune God, we are in the hands of one who is able to meet all of our needs and is able to take us through all of the deep trials of life, confident and consoled by divine grace.

We commit our ministry here to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon us as we listen to the word, as we sing together and express in song our thanksgiving and praise of our triune God. May, Lord, we have the sense of Thy presence with us now, through the remainder of our service.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Last night I took out the notes that I have been using on the Life of David, or themes from the Life of David, which is our general theme and I counted, I think, about 35 messages in this series. And I must confess when I started, I did not plan on having that many messages in the series, and we're still not through and it's number thirty-five. But, I must say, it has been most reward to me to study in detail the life of this great man, David, and I must confess also that I have a much higher regard for, not that I did not have a high regard for these books, but a much higher regard than I did before, for the content of them. And I must say that I have attempted to study fairly well these chapters. And I've been impressed very much with the narrator or the ultimate author, human author, of these chapters.

I've often read those chapters but this time, in studying them very carefully, I've been so impressed with the fact that one can see the hand of God in everything that is transpiring and some individuals, like Hushai, suddenly appear and then pass off the scene, but leave us a remarkable statement or two that, I think, will be forever with me. And I must say, I look forward to meeting Hushai when I get to heaven.

Our subject for today, chapter 17, is "Divine Action in the Minds of Men." Throughout Hebrew and Christian history, there is evidence of internal, invisible, untraceable action of the Lord God upon the minds of men. One finds this through the

Scriptures, and I'm sure that most of you sitting in this audience would think of places where you, too, have read that in the word of God. And it's not necessary nor do we have the time to turn up all of the passages that might illustrate the point. There is one in the last Book of the Revelation that sometimes we miss that may give you an indication, precisely of what I'm talking about. For in the description of the last days and in the struggle of the last days, the writer of the Revelation, the Apostle John, giving the revelation that comes from the Lord Jesus, says in Revelation 17:17, "For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled." "For God has put it in their hearts to fulfill His purpose." Well, we see an illustration of it in the chapter before us, and that's why we're calling this, "Divine Action in the Minds of Men." What we are really talking about, of course, is the free sovereign working of God in human affairs.

Now, if you'll think about it for a moment, there are some inferences from this that are very important. For example, the fact that God is a free God and sovereignly works in human affairs is involved in any just view of his freedom as an infinite God. If he is an infinite God, and I dare say every believing person in this auditorium would say he is an infinite God. Well, if he's an infinite God he must be free in his actions. And so he is free to sovereignly work to carry out his purposes. This free sovereign working of God in human affairs is implied in regeneration; for we are told in the Bible that we are born, not of men, not of the will of men, not of bloods, but we are born of God. And I'm sure you recognize that when Scripture says that we are born of God, that just as you and I do not have a thing to say about our physical birth, so we do not have a thing to say about our spiritual birth. That's the plain significance of the expression "Born again" we have been born again. We did not have a thing to do with our spiritual birth, just as we did not have anything to do with our physical birth, so far as the determination of it, the time of it.

The free working of God is essential to a morally holy government and, further, this free sovereign working of God is the ground of our faith in prayer. We could never have any faith that God would answer our prayers if we were not also confident that he was able to work in the hearts of men and accomplish his purposes.

Really, how foolish would it be for us to pray for certain individuals to be saved if God was not able to move their hearts to turn to him? As a matter of fact, if it were the other way around, if an individual himself determines his future by his free will, then we should avoid praying to God and we should pray to them. We should ask them to turn to the Lord. It would be foolish to pray this way. We want to pray horizontally and ask individuals to turn and try to give them persuasive arguments why they ought to turn. And God could be completely left out of it until they made their decision and then joined the family of God by virtue of their own free decision. I think you understand, most of you in Believers Chapel who have been here for a long time, because you've been able to stand the repetition of this idea for a lengthy period of time. [Laughter] And I certainly want to commend you for your patience. But, it is a truth that is so important that it must constantly be repeated because it's so contrary to the thinking of the world about us.

Now, I also, in the past, have cited Mr. Spurgeon's words concerning this, because perhaps he was the finest exponent in a popular way of the doctrine of sovereign grace. And he has a great many useful things to say about Arminian sermons. And in the midst of many things concerning Arminian sermons, he comments on the fact that, while it's true that an Arminian as he stands behind the pulpit, may preach the doctrine of free will, when he gets down upon his knees he doesn't really carry out his own doctrine. For what he does is, he prays as a Calvinist when he gets down on his knees. And then he goes on to say that he would like to offer an Arminian prayer. And this is the Arminian prayer. He says fancy him praying, "I, Lord, I thank thee that I'm not like these poor presumptuous Calvinists. Lord, I was born with a glorious free will. I was born with power by which I can turn to Thee of myself and I have improved my grace."

Now, you have to understand the background of the nineteenth century, when Mr. Spurgeon was talking about this. He and others, as Wesley and others have suggested, everyone has received sufficient grace to believe but the decision to finally consummate the act belongs to our free will. So that’s what he means by “improving grace.”

So he goes on to say, “If everybody had done,” this is the Arminian prayer, “If everybody had done the same with their grace that I have, they might all have been saved. Lord, I know that Thou doest not make us willing if we are not willing ourselves. Thou givest grace to everybody. Some do not improve it, but I do. There are many that will go to hell as much bought with the blood of Christ as I was. They had as much of the Holy Ghost given to them. They had as good a chance and were as much blessed as I am. It was not Thy grace that made us differ, I know it did a great deal, still I turned to the point. That is, the decision was ultimately mine. I made use of what was given to me and others did not. That’s the difference between me and them.”

That’s the end of the Arminian prayer that Mr. Spurgeon suggests is faithful to their doctrine. And then he goes on to say this, “That’s a prayer for the devil. For nobody else would offer such a prayer as that. Ah, when they are preaching and talking very slowly, there may be wrong doctrine. But when they come to pray, the true thing slips out. They cannot help it. If a man talks very slowly, he may speak in a fine manner, but when he comes to talk fast, the old brogue of the country where he was born slips out. I ask you again, did you ever meet a Christian who said, ‘I came to Christ without the power of the Spirit.’ If you ever did meet such a man, you need have no hesitation in saying, “My dear sir I quite believe it, and I believe you went away again without the power of the Spirit and that you know nothing about the matter and you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.”

You remember those were Peter’s words in Acts chapter 8 to Simon Magus. “Do I hear one Christian man saying, ‘I sought Jesus before he sought me. I went to the Spirit and the Spirit did not come to me,’” and so on. In other words, what we are talking about

is that the Scriptures set forth very plainly that if an individual comes to the Lord he comes to the Lord because God works in his heart and brings him out of his lost condition into the knowledge of the Lord.

This freedom of the Lord God to act sovereignly is the basis of our confidence in God's ultimate defeat of the forces of evil. It's the basis of our actions upon one another and we believe that we may affect the thinking of others and, preeminently, it's taught in the word of God. We are taught in Scripture that God does work in the minds and hearts of men to accomplish his will. "He works all things according to the counsel of his own will," the Apostle Paul states in the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Now, coming specifically to this chapter, I think, you will see that this truth is the critical factor in the overthrow of Absalom's rebellion. Everything looked hopeless for David. He was surprised. He did not understand what was taking place. He had to escape. He was fleeing for his life with a few of his valiant men. The nation was behind Absalom, so far as one could tell outwardly. And had it not been for the actions of the Lord God, as we shall see, David would have lost his throne and would have lost his place that God intended for him to have in the word of God. What we learn here, simply, is that the Lord has the power to manipulate the decision making process; that, precisely, to put it in our language, is what happens.

Now, if you look through the word of God, this is not something that is found only in a few places. Many of you are acquainted with the doctrine of the providence of God and, to state it very plainly, the providence of God in the Reformed Tradition specifically is the conviction that God in his goodness and in his power preserves, accompanies and directs the entire universe. We have so many illustrations in the word of God it seems fruitless to labor the point, but one thinks of the time of King Xerxes and Esther, and Mordecai, and Haman, and the Jews, and King Ahasuerus, or King Xerxes.

And you remember, in just a few lines what was happening. Haman, the wicked Haman, was determined to exterminate the Jews, if he possibly could. He had things well

in hand. As a matter of fact, he was so sure that he was going to be able to accomplish it, that he was engaged in the building of the gallows necessary to do it. And everything was proceeding according to plan until one night, Ahasuerus, having had too many cups of coffee, evidently, was unable to fall asleep. And, since he could not fall asleep, he called for one of the men by the side of him to bring out some of the records and let him spend some time reading.

Have you ever had that experience? You couldn't go to sleep so you got up and said, 'I better go ahead and read the rest of that story that I was reading.' And so he opened it up and he began to read, and he came across a little account in which it was stated that Mordecai had done something very significant. And he called the man over and he said, "What was done for Mordecai when he did all of this?" And the individual said, "Nothing was done for him." And so Xerxes thought something should be done for him. And so he called in Haman and he said, "Haman, what should we do for an individual who has done all of this?" And Haman, like so many of us, thought surely, 'He's talking about me.' And so he outlined exactly what he wanted. We ought to have a big parade. We ought to be able to put on royal garments and put on the proper headdress and we will proclaim before him, march him through the city. And he was all ready to realize all of his dreams and Xerxes said, "Well, that's what we'll do for Mordecai." Royal insomnia!

A friend of mine, a Bible teacher, likes to say, "Royal insomnia!" I've had some royal cases, too, but not that kind. Royal insomnia! But it was God's way of accomplishing his purpose by natural means. He couldn't sleep, but God's purpose was accomplished.

So many times in the word of God, I once cited Professor Bury, the well-known English historian, whose writings I studied when I was in college. He was discussing things that happened in the time of the Romans, and he said that he had been too rigid in his initial scientific assumptions and he'd come to the conclusion that the shape of

Cleopatra's nose altered the course of history. In other words, she had such an effect on the individual, Mark Anthony that that shape of her nose altered human history.

This past week, I have a book on my desk, I haven't had a chance to read it yet but, it's a book by Mortimer Adler, who amazes me. He's in his late eighties if he's still living. He wrote this book, I think it was published when he was eighty-six. He's written many, many books. And this book is a book entitled, "The Intellect: Mind over Matter." As I was thinking about the book sitting on my desk, I said, really that's the wrong title. It should be, "The Intellect: Mind over Matter and God Over the Mind," because that's precisely the way God accomplishes his purposes.

Well, let's turn to our chapter now. That's a rather lengthy introduction but I think we can handle the two accounts about Ahithophel and about Hushai and make the major point of the chapter.

What we have here is a war council, it's obvious. And David has been driven out of the town. And now Absalom wants to know, "What shall we do" at this point. And Ahithophel was a very wise, calculating, intelligent politician. And so he is asked for opinion with regard to the proper course and he speaks to Absalom. And in essence what Ahithophel says is, "what we need to do is to attack David and the remnants that are with him as soon as possible. We could this, while the iron is hot, plan." And so, he says, "what we should do is to choose twelve thousand men, a small fighting force, send them out after David and let them pursue David tonight! Not tomorrow! Tonight! While there is disorder; while they are weary and immediately realize what you are doing." It's the kind of plan that Colin Powell and Schwarzkopf followed in the Persian Gulf War. Do what you're going to do and do it swiftly and quickly so that the enemy does not have a chance to recoup and respond to it. And you will notice the way in which he puts it, it appears very convincing. In fact, it's so convincing that humanly speaking it, undoubtedly, would have succeeded.

Twelve thousand men after a straggling group of men with David, not yet over the Jordan River, the chances are it would have succeeded. You do notice, however, that there was one little bit of doubt because in verse 2, at the end of the verse he says, "And I will strike only the king." A slip of the tongue! In other words, he's acknowledging David is still the king. He says, "I will strike the king." He should have said, "I will strike David." But lingering deep down in his subconscious is the position that David has.

Now, at this moment, you might think since we read here that the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel. Well, why not do it? Why not go ahead? It's a plan that pleased them, so why not carry it out right now? Well, just looking at it from the standpoint of men that was a major mistake. But why is a puzzling thing unless we realize that God works in the minds of men.

Now, Hushai was not even a member of the council, because we read in verse 5, "Then Absalom said, 'Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he says too.'" So he wants a second opinion. It was a major mistake to do it. And what follows is Hushai's defense of a plan that, obviously, was not as good as the other plan, but guided by the Lord God, on the spur of the moment, he speaks impromptu. He's able to frame his language in such a way that he will actually win the struggle. It's what you might call the safety in numbers plan. No, twelve thousand men, you're going to have problems if you do that.

And so he appeals to Absalom's fears and to Absalom's vanity, and he appeals also to his suspicion. So you can just imagine how critical this was for Hushai, and he must have realized the tremendous responsibility that rested upon him to defend his king and his friend, David, now before a group who've had an excellent plan. And he knows the plan, now they've told him the plan. So he knows it's a good plan and what will he do on the spur of the moment in order to convince the leaders, Ahithophel and Absalom, particularly Absalom, that there is a better plan. And what he does is done in beautiful

flourish of literary skill. It's been called a literary coloratura, because you'll notice the similes, the metaphors that he uses in constructing his argument.

Now, he says, he begins. He has to acknowledge it's a good plan, so he says, "The advice that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time." It's a good plan, I'll admit it, but it's not good at this time. In essence, what he does is suggest a pan-Israelite army, selected from all of the tribes, from Dan to Beersheba, which, of course, would take days to accomplish. In the meantime, David would be able to escape. And, he does it in such a way as to play on all of these possibilities that may lie in the heart of Absalom.

Notice what he does. He says, "For, you know your father and his men, they are mighty men, and they are enraged in their minds," and now, one of his metaphors or similes, "like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field," so they're going to be a raging small group, but they're going to be raging. And "Your father is a man of war and will not camp with the people." You think that you can go down there with twelve thousand people and get David because he's going to be with the people who are down there. But you are mistaken. He's like Saddam Hussein. He's going to have his bunker somewhere and you're not going to be able to find him. They were confident they could. And so he's going to be hidden in some pit, or in some other place.

You'll notice these vague generalities that appear in his language, because he doesn't really know exactly how this thing is going. He's on his feet and he's just talking as he feels he must talk in this critical moment. "He's going to be in some pit, or in some other place. And it will be, when some of them are overthrown at the first, that whoever hears it will say, "There is a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom." And even he who is valiant," he says, "whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt completely. For all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and those who are with him are valiant men."

If you go down there and a few people of yours are killed, the word's going to get back quick to Jerusalem, David is slaughtering them. And everybody's going to flee.

"Therefore, I advise that all Israel be fully gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, like the," here's another one of his similes, "like the sand that is by the sea for multitude," and then, again, playing on his vanities, he says, "That you go to battle in person."

Now, you see, Ahithophel had set forth a plan that, if it had succeeded the people would say, "Ahithophel's great." Ahithophel is really our king, because they had been following his advice all along. "He's really our king!" Absalom realizes that much, at least. And Hushai plays on that fact and says, "You go to battle in person."

"So," he says, "we will come upon him in some place," again 'some place' "and we will fall on him," and here's another one of his similes, "as the dew falls on the ground." Just, we'll have so many people there it'll be impossible for David and his men to escape. "And of him and all the men who are with him there shall not be left so much as one."

And then, someone raised his hand and says, "Wait a minute! Suppose he goes into one of the walled and fortified cities?" And Hushai is ready for that, too. "Moreover, if he has withdrawn into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city; and we will pull it into the river, until there is not one small stone found there." What remarkable foresight at a critical time is displayed by Hushai. It doesn't contradict the good advice that's given. He acknowledges it's good, but it's not so just now.

And so with a lot of Oriental exaggeration such as ought to have put Absalom on his guard, nevertheless, he is able to paint such a picture that we read in verse 14, "So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel.'"

You know, I am sure that when Hushai was speaking, as he was giving at this very critical moment this remarkable speech that the angels in heaven were listening with a great deal of attention, wondering how in the world is he going to be able to forestall the defeat of David. And as they listen to this remarkable speech that we know, of course, now, was given to him by the Lord God, they must have been amazed at the effect of it.

Of course, it reflects on what happens centuries later, when the Lord Jesus begins his ministry and the same kind of questions befall the angels, and they wonder how is it going to be possible for the Son of God to overcome the gates of hell that are arrayed against him. And then, they discover, not knowing in experience what redemption is all about, that when our Lord is finally hung upon the Cross and crucified, thinking, perhaps, in the beginning, everything is lost, they discover everything is won, by the power of God, who has worked so mightily through the Son of God, contrary to human wisdom.

Well, the 14th verse is, of course, the key to the chapter. "So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel." For, for! This is why it's better! It's not really better. It's worse, as far as advice is concerned. Every military commander not knowing what was really happening, would have said, do what Ahithophel said. That's the thing to do. General Powell surely would have done that. General Schwarzkopf would have done that. They all would have agreed that's the thing to do. Anybody trained at West Point or any other military school would say that's the thing to do. If you delay, you're liable to lose the battle.

But, we read, "For the Lord," and incidentally, the "for" is in the Hebrew text, "for" is not added. "For the Lord had purposed to defeat." Now notice, "the good advice," not bad advice, the good advice. It's good. The Lord acknowledges that. "But he had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel to the intent that the Lord might bring disaster on Absalom." Amid all of the confusion of the rebellion, all of the confusion of the retreat, all of the confusion of the war council, all of the opinions that were being offered, in the midst of all of the confusion of these events happening one right after the other, there was an unseen presence directing everything. And that was the Lord God.

Well, I know, you can think of lots of texts in the word of God that fit this situation. There's one that comes home to me, always, and it's, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; like the rivers of water, he turns it wherever he wishes." "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; like the rivers of water, he turns it wherever he wishes."

You think George Bush makes his decisions? Well, he does, like Ahithophel, but the one who, ultimately, makes the decisions is the Lord God. He determines that George Bush will do this. And he determines that George Bush will do that. And he determines, because remember all of these public figures are ministers of God. Why are they called ministers of God? Because, ultimately, he's their master. And so the king's heart and the president's heart is in the hand of the Lord. He turns it whithersoever he wishes.

That's why, incidentally, when you go to the polling place and vote, and you vote honestly, you vote for the candidate you think is best, that ultimately the real one who is in control is the Lord God, and we can count upon that.

[Inaudible] any of you, but calling his name, I walked into the office, the tape room, on Wednesday morning and said something like, I've forgotten my exact words were, but something like, "Well, we're near the end of the world." [Laughter] And we turned out, he wasn't a great president. He wasn't even a good president, in my opinion, but we survived. As a matter of fact, we were the better for it. We learned some things by it. So we read in the word of God that the one who truly controls things is the Lord God. And when men seek to go contrary to the word of God, ultimately, God always wins.

When I was in college and not even a believer and reading Classical Greek, one of the men that I studied was Euripides. And I don't remember the statement of Euripides, but he did make the statement, "When God is contriving misfortunes for a man, he first deprives him of his reason." And so here these men were deprived of their reason, and they chose the bad plan instead of the good plan because the Lord God was making the ultimate decision.

Man, let us remember, is always free to act within the circumference of the divine decrees. Never forget it! He works all things according to the council of his own will, and most of us at one time or another have struggled with that particular viewpoint. But

when we read the word of God over and over again, we cannot help but, ultimately, come to it. And that's what happens here.

Well, the problem is to warn David and so we read a most interesting account. And we discover that Hushai is not the only servant of the Lord, because there is Hushai in Jerusalem, there are the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, they are on the side of the Lord's anointed King David in the city of Jerusalem. And, furthermore, their sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, they also are involved in this. And not only do we have important men like these men, but we have a woman whose name is not even given, who is a tool in what the Lord is doing. We have a female servant, a wench, the Authorized Version wench, who would come and tell them and they would go and tell King David. So there was a whole array of individuals who were appointed for particular tasks by the Lord God, who is rather good at thinking ahead.

Isn't it interesting? He's rather good at thinking ahead. And so when the individual is seen has to flee to the woman who has the well, the man's house who had a well, and they too had been prepared to be favorable to David. And they put these individuals down in the well and the woman took a cover and spread it over so that the thing was not known. This well owner, if he were not a loyal well owner, these fellows would have been in deep trouble. As it still was, they are in the deep, [Laughter] but they are protected by the Lord God.

And the last little account in the story that's so interesting is the death of Ahithophel. Ahithophel was a politician. I'm told that an honest politician is one that when he is bought, he'll stay bought. [Laughter] And, incidentally, I read another statement about a politician this week that I thought was really good. Have you ever wondered why there are so few female politicians, relatively speaking? Well, the reason is simple. It's too much trouble to put makeup on two faces. [More laughter]

Well, Ahithophel is an able man. There's no doubt about it, he was a very able man. He was the smartest man in Jerusalem, really. And the advice that he gave was

accepted by David and by Absalom. So in effect, he was running the country. But when he saw that the council decided against his plan and decided to accept Hushai's plan, he realized that his cause was lost. And not only did he realize that his cause was lost, but he knew that his personal cause was lost because he knew that if David was not struck immediately, he would ultimately win and Ahithophel would lose his life because he's a traitor. He had been David's familiar friend, as David put it in his Psalm 41. “My own familiar friend has lifted up his heel against me.” A traitor to the cause of David! And so, he went home, arranged his affairs, you can see he is wise, arranged his affairs, checked his will and then hanged himself.

The fact that he hung himself is so striking in the word of God, it's no wonder that the Lord Jesus, who is the preeminent student of the word of God saw in that an illustration, a type of Judas himself. Because, you see, David is a type of our Lord. He's David, the Lord Jesus is the son of David. David's enemy was Ahithophel. Our Lord's enemy was Judas. David's enemy betrayed him. Our Lord's enemy Judas betrayed him. And so he, as Judas leaves the company, the Lord Jesus cites Psalm 41, written by David about Ahithophel, “my own familiar friend hath lifted up his heel against me.” If you have any doubt about that use of Scripture, you'll find Peter using the same method in Acts chapter 1, when talking about Judas, also. He recognized it was a valid way to understand the word of God. And so, consequently, Ahithophel commits suicide. A striking event!

Well, the remainder of the chapter describes the beginning of the military campaign. That will continue and so we'll deal with that later on. Let me close by just a couple of comments.

The tragedy of Ahithophel, the man with whom David had taken, according to one of his psalms, sweet counsel, is the great tragedy of this chapter. His treachery, his inhumanity is bad, but the crowning crime is Ahithophel's rebellion against God's revealed method for bringing in the kingdom of God. That's his real crime, not simply

that he betrayed David but that in betraying David he rebelled against the Lord God. For of all of the people in this chapter, the one person who knew, clearly, and understood that David was the anointed king of Israel, it was Ahithophel. And so in acting the traitor against David, he was acting the traitor against God. No ingenuity can find an excuse for Ahithophel; just as no ingenuity, in spite of attempts by modern theologians, can find an excuse for Judas. Judas is the consummate traitor to the truth of God. And the self-centered rebellion of Ahithophel is so beautifully brought out in the first three verses.

I'll just read them quickly, noting. He says, "Now let me choose twelve thousand men and I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king. Then I will bring all the people with you." Those are the remarks of a self-centered man who worships himself, rebels against the truth of God and seeks to take over the kingdom.

Job says, "God takes the wise in their own craftiness." And He surely does it. We cannot fight against him. He will always win a battle. And the tragedy of our day, of course, is found in the same plain issue of antagonism to our Lord. When we do not respond to the Gospel, we are, in effect, taking the place of the Ahithophel's who react negatively to the plan and program of the Lord God. And our real enemy is ultimately the Lord God. It's not the Lord Jesus Christ, except in so far as he represents the will of God. It's, ultimately, rebellion against the Lord God in Heaven; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If you're here today and you've never believed in our Lord, we remind you of his saving sacrifice for sinners, and we remind you of the teaching of the word of God that so plainly points out that we all are sinners and fall under the judgment of God, if we do not flee to the grace and safety of the redeeming work of Christ.

Come to Christ! Believe in Him! Trust in Him! May God in his grace enable you to turn away from trust in yourself, in your good works, in your church, in the ordinances, in your education, your culture and all of the other things in which you trust; and may

you be enabled by God's grace to trust in Christ alone and the blood that was shed for sinners.

Let's stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Over and over again, displayed to us the glories of our Great God in Heaven, beside whom there is no God. We thank Thee for the grace shown to sinning men and women. And, Lord, if there are some here who have never believed in our Lord, may at this very moment within their hearts they confess their need, their sin, their guilt, their condemnation, and turn to Thee, through Christ, the Great God in Heaven, who forgives sin, forever, through the sacrifice of the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray, in His name. Amen.