

# The Friend God Sends

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, people of Covenant CRC. It's always a joy and a privilege to be here with you.! And my wife Barbara and I are thrilled and delighted for you! that you have a new pastor starting next Sunday.

So congratulations. What exciting news. That's really, really great news. And, you know, the first time I filled the pulpit here was over 20 years ago.

So it's really good to see how God is blessing you and will continue to pray for you, that he'll continue to bless you, and I'm sure that he will.

You know, one of the beautiful ways that God cares for his people during difficult and long seasons is that he sends faithful servants.

God sustains his church through faithful elders, faithful members, deacons, interim pastors, visiting preachers, quiet saints who keep loving and serving, and often it's only afterwards that we realize how faithful God has been.

[ 1 : 20 ] And God has been faithful to you, people of Covenant Church. And we're going to learn about God's faithfulness to King David this morning.

And so our text is 2 Samuel chapter 15, and I'm going to read the first 23 verses of this. So if you have your Bible, I'd like you to open it or take a pew Bible page.

I don't have the page number, but 2 Samuel 15 verses 1 to 23. This is the word of the Lord. In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with 50 men to run ahead of him.

He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, What town are you from?

He would answer, Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel. Then Absalom would say to him, Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you.

[ 2 : 33 ] And Absalom would add, If only I were appointed judge in the land, then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me, and I would see that he gets justice.

Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him, and kiss him. Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the Lord. While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow.

If the Lord takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron. The king said to him, Go in peace. So he went to Hebron. Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, Absalom is king in Hebron. Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithabel, the Gilanite, David's counselor, to come from Jilo, his hometown.

[ 3 : 56 ] And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing. A messenger came and told David, The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.

Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, Come, we must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us, and put the city to the sword.

The king's officials answered him, Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses. The king set out with his entire household, following him. But he left ten concubines to

take care of the palace.

And so the king set out with all the people following him, and they halted at a place some distance away. All his men marched past him, along with all the Carathites, Pelathites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had a country from Gath, marched before the king.

The king said to Ittai, the Gittite, Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. You came only yesterday, and today shall I make you wander about with us when I do not know where I am going?

[ 5 : 12 ] Go back and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you. But Ittai replied to the king, As surely as the Lord lives, and as my Lord the king lives, wherever my Lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there your servant will be.

David said to Ittai, Go ahead, march on. So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him. The whole country wept aloud as all the people passed by the king, as all the people passed by.

The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert. This is the reading of God's word. Let's pray.

Father, we give you thanks and praise for your word. We pray that you'll open our eyes today to your beauty, to your glory, and to your faithfulness, Lord.

Your faithfulness not just to David and to the people of Israel, but your faithfulness to us today, especially expressed in Jesus, the great friend that you've sent to us.

[ 6 : 23 ] Father, we ask this in his name. Amen. Well, friends, if ever there was a day that felt like the end of the world, it was this day, judgment day for King David.

If ever there was a day when David needed a friend to stand by him, to encourage him, it was this day.

This was a catastrophic day. As he flees the city of God in a trail of tears and disgrace, perhaps the words of Nathan the prophet ringing in his ears, the sword shall never depart from your house because you took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.

This was indeed a catastrophic day for David. And as we look at this story this morning, there are three things in particular I want to draw our attention to.

The first is the depths of David's brokenness and humiliation. The second is the resilience of David's faith, assaulted but still intact.

[ 7 : 56 ] And the third is the faithfulness of God who sends David an unexpected friend in his time of need.

We begin by looking at the depths of David's brokenness. You know, there are times in life when everything you hoped for and lived for seems to go right down the drain and you're left broken.

This is one of those times for King David. Everything has changed. David thinks things are going along just fine but he's been estranged from his favored son, Absalom.

That handsome man the Bible tells us was the most handsome of all men. He had long, beautiful hair and when he cut it, he would weigh it. He was a gifted and a talented guy.

But he'd been hanging out, as we read, outside the city gates. And when people would come, he'd say, what's your complaint? You got something for the king?

[ 9 : 09 ] Boy, if I were judging the land, I'd give you an answer. And he'd grab the men and give them a hug and kiss them and say, you know, what tribe are you from?

And everything that he did can be summarized in the words of verse 6, so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

And once he has the hearts of the people, he hatches a plot to steal the throne from his father, David. Well, in verses 13 through 15, we read that David's intelligence officers tell him of the plot and he is forced to abdicate his throne and to flee like a bird into the wilderness in this march, this trail of weeping and tears.

You might say, David's been in these kinds of circumstances before, hasn't he? I mean, he knows what it is to be on the run.

Remember when, after great battles, the people would sing, Saul has killed his thousands, but David slain his tens of thousands. And Saul became so jealous and so furious that he even threw a spirit, David, and tried to murder David.

[ 10 : 40 ] And David was forced at that time to flee the city out into the wilderness. So David knows what it is to live in caves and holes and be on the run.

But this is very different. That was when David was younger and he fled at that time with a clear conscience. You see, he had suffered for righteousness' sake.

It was an unjust persecution. He'd been utterly loyal to Saul, stood by him, fought for him.

He could cry out to God at that time and ask God to deliver him because he had been faithful to King Saul. Not perfectly righteous, but he had been righteous with respect to King Saul.

And he could call upon God to intervene between him and Saul on the side of justice because he was being persecuted unjustly.

[ 11 : 45 ] But now, this time, David flees the city with a soiled conscience. Yes, he had found forgiveness for his sin with Bathsheba and of murdering her husband by sending him to the front lines of the battle.

But David knows that he is responsible for the trouble he is now fleeing. It started with that adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.

Then there was the rape of his daughter Tamar by her half-brother. Then the revenge killing of the rapist by Absalom, David's other son, who, in an ironic twist, then Absalom had to flee the city.

Now it's David who flees the city. Well, it's out of that alienation from Absalom and all that sin and all that family trauma that David now finds himself fleeing from the sword of Absalom.

I want you to feel the depths of David's brokenness. I want you to see how catastrophic this is. This passage is rife with emotion, with weeping, a trail of tears, this procession of humiliation.

[ 13 : 19 ] David is a broken man. Look at verse 30. But David continued. We're going to read some verses we had not read before, so keep your Bible open.

Verse 30. But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered, and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads, too, and were weeping as they went up.

Now, his brokenness was partly due to his own sin, but also to the sense of betrayal. All the people had now gone over to Absalom, who had stolen their hearts.

His own trusted counselor, Ahithopel, went over to Absalom's side. Let me ask you a question. Can you think of another king in the Bible whose departure from Jerusalem reminds you of this scene?

Nearly a thousand years later, after the Last Supper, another king would leave the same city. He, too, would cross the Kidron Valley. He, too, would ascend the Mount of Olives.

[ 14 : 33 ] He, too, would be rejected by his own people. He, too, would be betrayed by somebody close to him. David left Jerusalem broken because of his own sin.

Jesus left Jerusalem bearing the sins of his people, bearing the sins of David himself. David deserved some of what he suffered, but Jesus deserved nothing at all.

He was innocent of all. He walked the road of sorrow in our place. Now, hold that thought. Our first point here, though, is look at David's brokenness, the depths of his humiliation.

That's point one. Secondly, I want us to look at the resilience of David's faith. David's faith. Assaulted, under attack, but still intact, still hanging on.

The resilience of David's faith. At his weakest moment, when he is utterly broken, when his conscience is soiled by his own sins that led to this catastrophe, and his foes are many, the evil one goes to work.

[ 15 : 58 ] And you know how the evil one works in this situation? He uses people. He uses people. Do you realize there's a psalm that was, David wrote it for this specific situation to tell us how he was feeling?

It's Psalm 3. Let me read a little bit of it to you. It begins by saying, a psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom.

So he wrote this very psalm to tell us what was going on. Look at what he says in the first two verses of Psalm 3. Lord, how many are my foes?

How many rise up against me? Many are saying of me, God will not deliver him. See how the evil one uses people?

People are out there saying, God's not going to deliver David. You know, Absalom had won their hearts, and they were not going for David. David says it.

[ 17 : 02 ] Many were saying, God will, that was the question. Will God deliver David? Many are going, no, no way. God is not going to deliver him. He's lost the blessing of the Lord.

Like Saul, he's lost the anointing. And David himself had to wonder if he had lost God's blessing. Was it true?

Would God deliver him? Was this the end of his rule? Listen, David doesn't know what's going to happen at this point. But he does know this, that he can trust God even in his darkest of hours. Look at the rest of Psalm 3. Let me read verses 3 through 6. But you, O Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the one who lifts my head high.

I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain. I lie down and sleep. I wake again because the Lord sustains me.

[18:02] I will not fear, though tens of thousands assail me on every side. So David, even though his faith is under assault, he reaches out in faith.

You know, it's during these dark times and hard times in life that we like, as Reformed Christians, we like to think about the P in tulip, perseverance of the saints, right?

That I will not fully or finally fall away from the Lord. I will persevere because God is at work in me. But I would contend that during these hard times, we actually need to change the P from perseverance of the saints to preservation of the saints.

Because if God didn't preserve us during these times, we certainly would fully and finally fall away if less left to our own devices.

David perseveres because God preserves him. David reaches out in faith. He seems to have reasons only for despair, but we see in Psalm 3 that he finds reasons for hope.

[19:20] He seeks to build on the rock of salvation. He knows what God has done for him in the past, and he prays for deliverance once more.

But the truth is, the truth is, David doesn't really know at this point whether he's going to be delivered or not, does he? He really doesn't know. Now look at verse 24.

Zadok was there too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the Ark of the Covenant of God. They set down the Ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.

So what are they doing here? They're bringing the Ark along with this procession out of the city as David flees. Why? Well, they feel like if the Ark is with David, God has to say David.

But look what David says in verse 25. Then the king said to Zadok, take the Ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it in his dwelling place again.

[20:30] But if he says, I am not pleased with you, then I am ready. Let him do to me whatever seems good to him. David says, no, take it back.

He knows that the physical presence of God is no guarantee of God's favor, nor is its absence a guarantee of lost favor.

But the question of God's favor is still an open question. David simply casts himself on the providence of God.

And this is a recurring theme throughout David's life. We see David's heart, a man after God's own heart. He knew he had blown it royally.

He knew what his sins deserved. He had watched another king, King Saul, lose the blessing of God and the spirit of God. And David knew that God would be totally justified if he did the same to him.

[21:33] So he puts himself completely at God's disposal as he flees into the wilderness. You know, a lighthouse in a storm doesn't stop the wind and it doesn't stop the waves.

The wind and the waves keep battering and battering and battering that lighthouse. The storm may rage all around it, but the question isn't whether it gets battered or not.

The question is whether it remains standing. And with God's help, David and all of us in these hard times remain standing.

Many are saying of him, there is no salvation for him in God, but by God's grace, he continued to trust. He continued to believe.

When Martin Luther stood before the emperor at Worms, he wasn't a fearless superhero. He spent the previous night praying because he was terrified.

[22:35] He knew he could lose everything, yet the next day he stood and said, my conscience is captive to the word of God. Here I stand. I will not recant. I can do no other.

See, courage is not the absence of fear. Faith is not the absence of doubt. David is afraid. David is broken, but he still throws himself on the mercy of God.

So now, we've seen the depths of David's brokenness. And we've seen the resilience of David's faith, battered, but still intact.

And finally, we see the faithfulness of God who sends an unexpected friend. We see God's faithfulness in the friend that God sends. If ever David needed someone to stand by him, it was right now.

[ 23 : 39 ] Now look at, there's a little transition here. We see in verse 16 that as David and his entire household and this big trail of people are leaving the city, they come to a distant place.

And he's got his family, his household, everybody's, everybody's there. He's got his own private army of mercenaries. Many of them are foreigners. And we see in verse 17 that David and his band come to this distant place.

And starting here, the story becomes a series of encounters between David and various people. And we're not going to look at all of them this morning.

We don't have time. But we're just going to finish by looking at the first encounter. And in each one of these encounters that David has with different people, the issue is, are you a friend of the king or are you not?

Are you loyal to David or are you not? And so this is, this is where we pick it up. Verse 19 tells us that this first person David meets with, this first encounter is with Ittai the Gittite.

[ 24 : 51 ] Now, parents, if you're going to have kids, Ittai's a good name. You may want to consider that. He's got 600 Gittite mercenaries, soldiers with him from Gath.

This is not a Hebrew town. These are foreigners. Right? That's where Goliath was from, Gath. And so, look at what David says to Ittai in verses 19 and 20.

This is worth reading. The king said to Ittai the Gittite, why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom.

You are a foreigner in exile from your homeland. You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us when I do not know where I am going?

Go back and take your people with you. May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness. Now, it's interesting. In verse 19, the NIV says that David says, go back and stay with King Absalom.

[ 26 : 02 ] Go back to Jerusalem. Stay with King Absalom. That's not what he says. The word Absalom, the name is not in that, in the Hebrew text. He says, go back and stay with the king.

He doesn't mention Absalom. And it's almost like David can't even bring himself to think about the fact that his own son has betrayed him to become the king.

And at the same time, when he just says the king, he's leaving the door cracked open for that king to be him as God restores him rather than his son Absalom.

That is faith. That is faith. David says to Ittai, am I going to make you wander about with us when I don't even know where I'm going?

I don't know what the future holds. Go back and take your people with you. What does Ittai have to gain here? He's got nothing to gain. Only death, right?

[ 27 : 01 ] Only death for him and his 600 men. He knows that David's under attack by his own son. But there's a proverb. Proverb 18:24 says, there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

And Ittai proves to be that friend. Look at Ittai's answer to David in verse 21. As surely as the Lord lives and as my Lord the king lives, wherever my Lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.

Sounds like Ruth, doesn't it? To Naomi. Hey, wherever you go, King David. He takes that king's crown. David's like, I don't know if I'm going to be king.

And he takes that king's crown and sets it right back on David's head. It says, David, I am with you wherever you go, even if it means life or death. Here's another place where the NIV gets it wrong. In the Hebrew, He doesn't see whether, Ittai does not say whether it means life or death. He says literally whether it means death or life. It's reversed.

[ 28 : 18 ] What's He saying? He knows he's got to count the cost. He knows that this may not have a happy ending. And yet He says, David, I'm there with you.

You know, how refreshing it is to have friends like Ittai during life's darkest hours. How refreshing are those friends who come in our times of trial, our times of failure, our times of sin, our times of shame, not with condemnation, not with accusation, but with steadfast love as God deals with us. Do you have friends like that? Praise God. Praise God for them. Are you a friend like that? I want to be a friend like Ittai, a friend who stands closer than a brother.

We all need friends like that. And we all need to be friends like that. And if we had more time this morning to dig further into this passage, we could talk about other friends in this story.

Hushai the Archite. There's another name for you parents. Hushai. Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Ziba the steward of Mithibosheth. Those who remained loyal to David in his darkest hour.

[ 29 : 46 ] Now, we don't have time to dig into the rest of the story. So let me summarize what happens and let's draw a conclusion and bring it to a close.

Here's what happens. God does deliver David. You know the story. There's a great battle in the field, in the forest of Ephraim. Ittai leads one third of David's army.

David puts him right in charge of a third of his army. And many are killed. Many of Ittai's men are killed. But David, Absalom, you know, is killed.

But David is indeed delivered back to his throne. He is restored to his throne in Jerusalem.

Question. David had messed up royally. What does God do with his believing children when they've messed up really, really, really bad?

[ 30 : 52 ] Is there still grace? Is there still grace for them when they've brought suffering down not only on their own heads, but on their families, on their supporters, on their employees, on their citizens?

How does God deal with people, his people, in the midst of their sins? Is there still grace? The answer, my friends, is yes.

A thousand times yes. There are consequences. And David knows that as he's forced to flee the city. But at the same time, there is grace because that is the good news of the gospel.

Jesus died for arsons. He died for davidson's. And there is grace for God's people. And even as he's fleeing the city, he's experiencing consequences.

But he ultimately will be restored. Now, in conclusion, the hero of the story is not David. The hero of this story is not Ittai.

[ 31 : 59 ] I don't want to give you that impression. It's not Hushai. It's not Zadok or any of the other faithful friends we encounter along the way. The hero of this story is the Lord God Almighty himself.

For it's he who remains faithful when we are weak. It's God who preserves our faith when it's under assault. It's God who provides what his people need at just the right moment.

And one of the great ways God demonstrates his faithfulness to us is by sending faithful friends, faithful pastors, faithful interim pastors, faithful pulpit fills, faithful lay people, faithful members, faithful servants and friends to stand by his people, no matter what the circumstances are.

Yet, all of those faithful people point us to an even greater friend. When we were not merely discouraged, but when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, when we were not merely wandering, but we were enemies of God, shaking our fists at a holy God, the Father sent his own Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you remember what the religious leaders accused Jesus of being? A friend of tax collectors and sinners. And they meant it as an insult. But we take it as one of the sweetest truths in all of Scripture.

[ 33 : 34 ] Jesus, a friend of sinners like me. Jesus himself said, greater has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends, and that is exactly what he did.

He laid down his life for us that we might be reconciled to God. There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother, and his name is Jesus.

He is the friend who will never abandon his people. He is the friend who says, I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. He is the friend who walks with us through our deepest sorrows, our greatest failures, and our darkest nights.

And perhaps one of the lessons this congregation has learned over the last three years is God has sent faithful friends and as you've prepared to bring a new pastor on, that God has been faithful to you.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we give you thanks and praise for this wonderful passage. We give you thanks and praise that, Lord Jesus, you are indeed a friend for sinners.

[ 34 : 52 ] We love you. We praise you. We thank you for your grace and mercy, for befriending us, and more than that, for dying for our sins, for changing our hearts, for changing the direction of our lives.

We give you thanks and praise, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.