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Title: Closer Than a Brother

Text: 2 Samuel 15-19

The effects of David's sin with Bathsheba are most evident. David has seen his family demolished, innocent lives devastated and people have been destroyed and killed, all because of the choices David made. He is at the lowest point of his life! David's own son, Absalom, has risen up in rebellion against him and has driven him from his palace and from the city of Jerusalem. This passage finds David on the run for his life FROM HIS OWN SON!

At this point in time, David probably DOESN'T need a lecture on being a better father. He likely does not need a seminar on how to govern a kingdom. He does not need someone coming along to tell him what a failure he is. HE KNOWS THAT WELL ENOUGH BY NOW. What David NEEDS is a FRIEND! 2 Samuel 15-19 talks about some friends that walked into David's life at just the moment he needed them. You see, the Bible says, *"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24). In the verses we will study today, we will see this passage come to life. In the friends who came to David's aid in his time of need, we can see how the best of friends behave AND we can see a picture of the Ultimate Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to take our time today and preach on the thought "Closer Than A Brother." Allow me to point out the kinds of friends David had in his life. David's friends' names are not common to me. They are Ittai the Gittite, Zadok, Abiathar, Hushai the Archite, Shobi, Machir, Barzillai and Joab. I want you to see some incredible characteristics of David's friends. Let me introduce you to his first friend.

- 1. David had HEARTFELT Friends – Ittai the Gittite (2 Sam. 15:18-22).** Ittai is the commander of a group of 600 men that came to Israel from Gath to follow David. Gath, as you may know is in the land of the Philistines. It was also the home of Goliath. You might also remember that David spent some time living in Philistia when he was on the run from King Saul (1 Sam. 27-30). Apparently, David made an impression on Ittai and the rest of these men. Now that David is on the run again, Ittai expresses his desire to be with David. Ittai is a person who has been in the background. I believe this is the first time in Scripture that his name is mentioned. But, when the chips were down in David's life, Ittai steps up and demonstrates the depths of his love for the exiled king. In fact, he pledges his absolute allegiance to David, even if it means his (Ittai's) death. That is a true friend! Years ago a British newspaper ran a contest asking for the definition of "friend." The winning entry was this: "A friend is the first person who comes in when the whole world goes out." That's pretty much what Ittai did for David! As we go through this life, there are few people that will fit into THAT category for you and me. But, Thank God for our true friends. I had a couple of people offer me one of their kidneys when they found out I had kidney cancer. One was a Baptist pastor. I'll always hold that brother dear. I don't think I'll ever forget Sunday, December 18, 2011. That's the day I shared here that I had been diagnosed with kidney cancer and Brother Harvey Rhodes came to the front and with tears streaming down his face prayed, "Lord, heal Pastor Jim and take me." Thank God for the people who love us when we are on top AND when we hit bottom. If you have a friend like Ittai, then you are a wealthy person! Sadly, many people will be your friend when all is well in your life and when they can benefit from being around you. The Prodigal Son had many friends when he had plenty, but where were they when he had nothing? A real friend loves you when you have absolutely nothing left to give! ILLUSTRATION: Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. I'm generally not one to recommend movies from the pulpit, but the movie "42" is a good one. Breaking baseball's color barrier, Jackie Robinson faced jeering crowds in EVERY stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. The fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then, shortstop Pee Wee Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career. I may not have many friends like Ittai in my life, but I am glad that I have a Friend who sticks closer than a brother. One who said He would never walk out on me - *"...I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). One who tells me He loves me regardless of my current condition - *"...Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love..."* (Jeremiah 31:3). I have a Friend who cares for me when I am up, and runs to my side when I am down. Jesus is a TRUE Friend!
- 2. David had HUMBLE Friends – Zadok and Abiathar (2 Sam. 15:23-28).** Zadok and Abiathar were priests. They were men of God who loved David and wanted to follow him. When David fled from Absalom, they followed

David, bringing with them the Ark of the Covenant. David, however, sends them back to Jerusalem, placing his trust in the power of God to deliver him. David tells them that they can best serve him by being his eyes and ears in the city. Then, without comment, the two priests turn around and carry the Ark back into the city. By returning to Jerusalem and agreeing to act as spies for David, these men took a great risk! They, along with Ittai, put their very lives on the line for their friend. These two demonstrate one of the great marks of a true friend. A genuine friend will love you and accept you, even when he does not understand you or agree with you. A real friend will stand by you regardless of the risks involved. They will stick out their necks for you. They will be there when others turn and walk away! A genuine friend might even get hurt in the process of taking your side. But, no matter where you look, you will find them standing firm, in your corner! That is a real friend! If you have a friend like that, then God has greatly blessed your life. ILLUSTRATION: Two men were said to be out hunting in the northern U.S. Suddenly one yelled and the other looked up to see a GRIZZLY charging them. The first started to frantically put on his tennis shoes. His friend anxiously asked, "What are you doing? Don't you know you can't outrun a grizzly bear?" "I don't have to outrun the grizzly. I just have to outrun you!" That might be the kind of friends most of us have. When the chips are down, they think of THEMSELVES FIRST. A BETTER FRIEND would put YOU first! ILLUSTRATION: Sam Davis was a Confederate spy executed at Pulaski, Tennessee, for his crime. When captured by the Union army, he had in his possession some papers of vital importance. After examining the case closely, the officers in charge knew he must have had an accomplice in securing the papers. He was court-martialed, led out before the firing squad and blindfolded. Then the officer in charge put forward a proposition: "If you will give us the name of the man who furnished you this information, you may go free." Sam Davis did not hesitate in his reply, "If I had a thousand lives, I would give them all before I would betray a friend." I am glad to report to you that WE SAINTS have such a Friend in Jesus! He loves us so much that even when we were His enemies, He gave His life on the cross to save our souls. He even called us His friends when we were acting like His enemies. "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends*" (John 15:13). He loves us when we are unlovable. He loves us though we often act foolishly toward Him. He loves us even though we do not deserve His love. He is a faithful Friend!

3. **David had HEROIC Friends – Hushai the Archite (2 Sam. 15:30-37).** We are told in verse 37 that Hushai is David's friend. He comes to meet David as David is leaving Jerusalem, and Hushai is clearly in mourning. He is broken hearted over what is happening to his king and friend. David sends him back into the city. He tells him to go to Absalom and feign allegiance. David wants Hushai to counter the counsel of old Ahithophel. Ahithophel was David's counselor, but he was also Bathsheba's grandfather. He saw the rebellion of Absalom as an opportunity to get even with David for what he had done to Bathsheba and Uriah. So, Hushai does what David asks and saves David's life. He served as David's eyes and ears in the throne room. He was heroic in that he laid his life on the line for his friend. One slip and Hushai could have been a dead man! Few, but precious, are the friends that will take that kind of stand for you. David was blessed in that he had a few people who were willing to take a chance to help him in his time of need. He had Hushai, Zadok, Abiathar, their two sons Jonathan and Ahimaaz, an unknown girl who delivered a message (17:17), and an unnamed woman who hid Jonathan and Ahimaaz as they carried a message to David (17:18-21). Thank the Lord for those people who will stand by us no matter what the cost! That is the mark of a true friend – they always put you first! We have such a Friend in the Lord Jesus! He put everything on the line for us, His friends. He placed us ahead of Himself. He stormed the ramparts of Hell! He defeated the power of sin, death, Hell and the grave! He gave us the victory that He had suffered to win. Thank God for a Friend like Him!
4. **David had HELPFUL Friends – Shobi, Machir and Barzillai (2 Sam. 17:27-28).** These three men were nobodies who became somebodies in the life of David. They, too, walked in when most everyone else walked out. When they came, they came in at the right time and with exactly what David needed. Let's look at these men a little closer. Shobi – He was an Ammonite. His father, Nahash the king of Ammon, was cruel beyond words (1 Sam. 11). His brother, Hunan, had embarrassed David's messengers (2 Sam. 10). But, Shobi became an ally of David and stood by him through these difficult days. David had fought against Shobi's people, but Shobi did not allow the past to cloud his love for David. Machir – He was the man from Lo Debar who gave shelter to Mephibosheth. He was the kind of person who had a tender heart and seemed to want to reach out and help others. He may have thought that he had already given enough, but he gave more because he was David's friend. He never forgot what David had done for Mephibosheth. Barzillai – He was an old man and had plenty of money (2 Sam. 19:32). He could have said, "Get someone else! I'm old and I'm tired." But, he didn't! He was David's friend and he rose to the challenge. When he was needed, he came and gave to his friend. These

men reveal the true nature of friendship. They gave without being asked and they asked for nothing in return. They gave out of love with no hidden agenda. They did what they did because THEY LOVED DAVID. He was their friend and no price was too high and no inconvenience too great. They did WHAT THEY COULD for their friend. Notice where David is when these three come to him. He is in a place called "*Mahanaim*." This is not the first time this place has been mentioned in the Bible. The first time it is mentioned is during the life of Jacob (Genesis 32:1-2). Just like the angels came and ministered to Jacob, Shobi, Machir and Barzillai came and did the angel's work in David's life. Thank God for friends like these! ILLUSTRATION: One of the all-time greats in baseball was Babe Ruth. His bat had the power of a cannon, and his record of 714 home runs remained until Hank Aaron came along. The Babe was the idol of sports fans, but in time age took its toll, and his popularity began to wane. Finally the Yankees traded him to the Braves. In one of his last games in Cincinnati, Babe Ruth began to falter. He struck out and made several misplays that allowed the Reds to score five runs in one inning. As the Babe walked toward the dugout, chin down and dejected, there rose from the stands an enormous storm of boos and catcalls. Some fans actually shook their fists. Then a wonderful thing happened. A little boy jumped over the railing, and with tears streaming down his cheeks, he ran out to the great athlete. Unashamedly, he flung his arms around the Babe's legs and held on tightly. Babe Ruth scooped him up, hugged him, and set him down again. Patting him gently on the head, he took his hand and the two of them walked off the field together. That is the kind of Friend the saints have found in Jesus! He came in when we had NO hope. He gave us just WHAT we needed WHEN we needed it! He did, not the work of an angel, but the work of a Savior in our lives. He gave His ALL and never stopped to consider the cost or to ask for repayment! As the song writer said, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus!"

5. **David had HONEST Friends – Joab (2 Sam. 19:1-8).** The last friend we will consider is Joab. He was David's nephew and he was the Commander of David's army. During the battle to retake Jerusalem and to bring David back to the throne, David's son Absalom becomes trapped in a tree by his hair (2 Sam. 18:9-17). Joab finds him hanging there and he and his armor-bearers kill Absalom. When David hears the news, he is devastated and goes off by himself to mourn (2 Sam. 18:23-33). David is overcome with grief and guilt and cannot comprehend that the kingdom had been returned to him. When Joab hears how David is acting, he goes to David and rebukes him for not praising the people for bringing him back to the throne. He reminds David that there are larger issues at stake. David is still king and as king he has a responsibility to the people. He reminds David that HE has a job to do! David sees his error and goes out to meet the people. Joab was a friend because he told David the truth! He would not stand by and watch his friend make a mistake that he would later regret. That is what a friend does. They will tell you the truth about your life and your decisions. They do so NOT to HURT you, but to HELP you avoid the pain that comes with foolish errors. Here is what the Bible says about that kind of friend – "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*" (Proverbs 27:6). David had a friend like that in Joab and he had a friend like that in Nathan, the prophet (2 Sam. 12:7). If you have a friend who loves you enough to tell you the truth, then you are a blessed individual. Real friends don't pull punches – THEY TELL US THE TRUTH! Thank God that Jesus is the kind of Friend who tells us the truth! He tells us that we are sinners in need of a Savior. He warns us to avoid the fires of Hell. He confronts us about the way we live our lives and He does all this because HE LOVES US (Revelation 3:19; Job 5:17-18).
6. **Conclusion.** This period of David's life was the HARDEST he would ever face. Yet, face it he did! And he faced it with the help of his friends. The people God providentially placed within his life made the road easier and the burden lighter. David was a RICH man, NOT because he had WEALTH, or position or power, but because he had FRIENDS! Thank God for our friends! They are like fine jewels affixed in the crown of our lives. When God gives us people like He gave David, He has blessed us incredibly. Thank God "*there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*." What are we to take away from this message? **A. WE ARE BLESSED TO HAVE FRIENDS.** We need to ask the Lord to help us recognize who they are so we can be thankful for them; so we can cultivate our relationship with them; and so, we can be a friend to them in return. **B. WE NEED TO FIND SOMEONE TO BE A FRIEND TO.** There are lonely, hurting people all around us. We can demonstrate the love of Jesus to them by being a friend. **C. LASTLY and MOST IMPORTANTLY, the GREATEST FRIEND of them all is JESUS!** JESUS is the ULTIMATE FRIEND. He gave His life to save us (John 15:13). He is always with us (Hebrews 13:5). He doesn't mind it when we come to Him with our problems (1 Peter 5:7). He hurts when we hurt (Hebrews 4:15). He has the will and the resources to meet our needs (Hebrews 4:16; Philippians 4:19). He will NEVER let us down! If the Lord has spoken to your heart about this matter of friendship, then I challenge you to do something about it. Thank God for your friends. Ask God who you can be a friend to. THANK JESUS for being your ULTIMATE FRIEND!