

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

**Date: October 11, 2015**

**Title: "Digging Out the Root of Bitterness"**

**Text: 2 Samuel 17:23**

*"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, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb" (2 Samuel 17:23).*

I am not much of a gardener, but I do know this: some plants, ESPECIALLY some weeds, will never die unless you completely dig out their roots. You can cut them off at the surface time after time, but they just keep coming back. However, when the root is exposed and removed from the soil, the plant is gone. It takes work to dig out roots, but it is worth the effort, since it protects the other plants in the garden.

I want to preach on this thought today: Removing (Digging Out) The Root of Bitterness. Do you know what bitterness is? The word is an adjective and it has the following definitions: a. strong and sharp in taste b. resentful c. difficult to accept d. hostile e. very cold. This morning, I plan to focus on that second definition: Resentful. It has the idea of brooding anger over that which has happened in your life. This anger produces a bad spirit within a person. It is a spirit of hostility and coldness toward God or others.

Where does bitterness come from? Bitterness can come about as the result of what others do to us or what others say about us. Sometimes, bitterness can result from the events of life themselves, as we blame God or others for our troubles. Bitterness can affect every relationship within your life, but it will likely affect your relationship with the Lord most of all. The Bible talks about this "*root of bitterness*" that is a possibility in our lives. Notice Deuteronomy 29:18, *"...so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness..."* And Hebrews 12:15, *"...looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;"* These verses refer to that "*root of bitterness*". It is called a root because it begins hidden within the soil of your heart. From there, its roots will entwine themselves around your heart and mind, until they choke the life out of you emotionally and spiritually. If allowed to grow unchecked, this "*root of bitterness*" will spring up into a plant that will cast a shadow over everything you are and do. A "*root of bitterness*" in your life will literally come to dominate your very existence.

In our text, we are presented with a man who was in the strangle hold of a massive "*root of bitterness*". Ahithophel met a tragic end because he allowed a root of bitterness to flourish in his life. His was a sad fate, but thankfully, there are lessons that we can learn from his tragedy that will help us to avoid the same fate. What we can learn here will give us much help in fighting the battle with bitterness we all face from time to time.

- 1. The Testimony of Ahithophel's Life. A. He had the Testimony of a Saved Man.** Many things in this man's life give the indication that he was a saved man. **He Sacrificed to God** – 2 Samuel 15:12. The very first time he appears in the Bible, he appears engaged in the act of worship. This indicates that he was a keeper of the Law and a worshipper of the Lord. **He Spoke for God** – 2 Samuel 16:23. Ahithophel had the reputation as a man who gave good, godly counsel. In fact, this verse says that hearing a word from Ahithophel was just like getting a word directly from the mouth of God! **He was a Serving man.** Reading about this man's life teaches us that he did not just believe in God, but he also served God by serving others. **He was a Counselor to God's man** – 2 Samuel 15:12. Great leaders have always surrounded themselves with good counselors and David was no exception. Ahithophel was one of the men David trusted for advice and direction as he governed the nation of Israel. **He was a Companion of God's man** – Psalm 41:9. In this Psalm, which looks back on the treachery of Ahithophel's life, David refers to him as "*my familiar friend*". The word "*familiar*" comes from the same root that is often translated "peace". These men were at peace with one another. They were as close as men could be. The word "*friend*" comes from a word that can be translated "great champion". I think that in using these two words, David is saying, "Ahithophel and I were closer than brothers. Our hearts were knitted together as one and we walked together in peace." He was a friend to the man of God! Note: In spite of the fact that Ahithophel gave EVERY outward indication that all was well between himself and the Lord and between himself and David, there was something working in his heart that would eventually destroy everything. Even during these times of his life, Ahithophel was being eaten alive, from the inside out, by an event that had happened years earlier. I pointed out all those positive things from the life of Ahithophel to say this to you: You cannot

always tell from the outward signs what is happening in a person's heart! You may be thinking: "Preacher, no one here has a root of bitterness in his heart. After all, we are at church on a Sunday morning. We have a smile on our faces; we are joyous; we are worshipping together; everything is alright." 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us, *"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* I think Ahithophel is about to teach us that what you see on the OUTSIDE does not always show you the true condition of the heart! Have you ever heard the word "hypocrite"? It was how Jesus referred to the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27). It is an interesting word. It was originally used to refer to "an actor, or one who plays a part." In the famous Greek tragedies, one actor would often play many parts. This actor would have a different mask for each part he was to play. As he transitioned from part to part, he would simply switch one mask for another. Hence, hypocrisy came to refer to someone who "plays different parts by hiding behind different masks." Someone who wears their church face on Sunday and lives like the world on Monday is a hypocrite. By the same token, someone who loves you to your face, but secretly despises you in their hearts is also a hypocrite. They are merely playing a part and hiding behind a mask. What is the bottom line? What you SEE is NOT always what you get! People tend to try and hide a lot of themselves from others. But, we all need to remember, GOD SEES IT ALL – even that which you think you have hidden. Hebrews 4:13 – *"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."* Every once in a while I hear someone say they aren't going to church because of the hypocrites. I believe it's better to go to church a few hours a week with a few hypocrites than to go to hell for eternity with a host of them! And if you don't want to be a hypocrite and you aren't attending church because of hypocrites, then you can't go to the store, because I've seen hypocrites there. You can't go to the hospital, because hypocrites have been seen there. In fact, the only place without hypocrites is heaven, and the best place to encourage you toward heaven is the church. So staying away from church because of hypocrites might make you a hypocrite. (I know I'm preaching to the folks who aren't here.)

- 2. The Tragedy of Ahithophel's Life.** The bitterness that was hidden within the heart of Ahithophel finally came out. Notice how it manifested itself in his life. **A Tragic Conspiracy.** When David's son Absalom rebelled against his father, Ahithophel saw his chance to enact his revenge upon King David. He joined the rebellion and stood against God's anointed (2 Samuel 15:31; Psalm 41:9). **A Tragic Counsel.** Out of his hatred for David, Ahithophel gave Absalom two words of counsel. The first recommendation he made was designed to DISGRACE King David (2 Samuel 16:20-23). By having Absalom go in to his father's concubines, he publicly disgraced David and created a rift between father and son that would never be healed. The second recommendation was designed to DESTROY King David (2 Samuel 17:1-4). Had this second piece of advice been followed, it is possible that David would have been defeated. **A Tragic Conclusion.** Thankfully, David had a true friend in Absalom's court, a man by the name of Hushai. Hushai had originally planned to go with David when he fled from Absalom, but at David's request, he stayed behind in the city to try and overthrow the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:32-37). Hushai comes to Absalom and professes his loyalty (2 Samuel 16:16-19). After he has gained Absalom's confidence, Hushai contradicts the wise counsel of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:1-22), which resulted in Absalom accepting Hushai's counsel and David being warned of what is about to take place and thus David is spared. Of course, the key verse is 2 Samuel 17:14 – *"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."* God was behind all this intrigue, because David, not Absalom, was the anointed king of Israel! When Ahithophel sees that his counsel has been rejected and that his plans to defeat and destroy David have failed, he returns to his house, puts everything in order and commits suicide! What a tragic end to what had been a good life! **Note:** Ahithophel did all these evil things because there was a root of bitterness in his life. He hated David and had merely pretended to be his friend all those years. As that root of bitterness grew in his life, Ahithophel lost sight of his former friendship with David. He lost sight of his walk with the Lord. EVERYTHING of value in his life had been choked out and he was left with nothing but bitterness and hatred. The root of bitterness had utterly consumed this man. As tragic as this events may be, I would like to point out that there are likely those of Marlowe Assembly of God who are also afflicted with a root of bitterness. Because of some events in your past; because of what someone said TO you or ABOUT you; because you didn't get your way at some point, your feelings are hurt. You are angry at someone and you want revenge. You are hurt and you want them to hurt. You are offended and so you give them the cold shoulder, or purposely go out of your way to avoid having to speak to them. You think you are

hurting them, but in reality, you are hurting YOURSELF! Your bitterness will kill no one but YOU! When you and I allow bitterness over the hurts, slights and events of life to control us, we are committing slow, spiritual suicide. When we allow our hurts to linger, they will grow into a root of bitterness that will stifle anything spiritual within our lives. It is a tremendous tragedy when saved, spiritual people allow their lives to be consumed by hate, anger and bitterness! The best thing you can do is BUILD A BRIDGE AND GET OVER IT before it kills you!

- 3. The Teaching of Ahithophel's Life.** As we look at Ahithophel's life, I think you would agree with me that his life is a tragedy. His life is a lesson in foolishness. This man truly lives up to his name. Ahithophel means "Brother of Folly; or Brother of Ruin". Knowing what happened to him, I think we would all confess that we do not want the same thing to happen to us. So, what lessons can we take away from this study? There are a couple. **The Reasons That Produced His Fall.** I have talked a lot about Ahithophel's bitterness, but I have not yet told you what he was bitter over. I think we need to know. There are two passages of scripture that reveal the reasons behind this man's bitterness and hatred toward David. They are 2 Samuel 11:1-27 and 23:34. Looking at these two passages together you can see that Bathsheba was the granddaughter of Ahithophel. **David had treated his granddaughter like she was a plaything AND David had arranged the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite.** Considering what David did, it is no wonder that Ahithophel was angry! And, he allowed his anger to burn for some 9 years, all the while feigning friendship toward David, biding his time until he could exact revenge. This bitterness ate Ahithophel alive until he was brought to the point of intrigue and murder. 2 Samuel 17:1-4 – *"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, when he saw that his plans had failed and the man he hated would return to the throne, Ahithophel took his own life, rather than face David. Can you see the danger in allowing a root of bitterness to flourish in your life? Yet, in all of this, Ahithophel forgot two important truths. God is sovereign AND He is able to deal with the sins of His children (2 Samuel 17:14; Revelation 3:19). David had already paid dearly for his indiscretion with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12), and he would continue to pay for the murder of Uriah for the rest of his life (2 Kings 12:9-10). God's children NEVER get away with sin! **The Remedies That Prevent Our Failure.** With all this in mind, what can we do to avoid being consumed by a root of bitterness? Thankfully the Bible holds the answer to this question. **Acknowledge your own sin in allowing a root of bitterness to flourish.** When you harbor resentment in your heart and fail to extend forgiveness to those who hurt you, then you are just as guilty as they are in the eyes of the Lord. Your first step is to admit your own wrong before the Lord (1 John 1:9). **People must be forgiven!** This is NOT an option; it is a necessity (Matthew 18:15-17; 18:21-35; Luke 17:1-5; Ephesians 4:32). It is better to confront those who have offended you and get things settled than it is to allow bitterness to consume from the inside out! Remember, God knows how to take care of His own children (Hebrews 12:6-12; Revelation 3:19; Romans 12:17-21). **Past events must be forgotten!** What happened yesterday can never be changed. But, you do hold the key to tomorrow. You should never allow the hurts of yesterday to control your life today. It is a shame when we drag around the baggage of what someone said, what someone did or how we were hurt. It does nothing but strangle the spiritual life right out of you! You say, "I can't forget it!" Jesus says *"Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). He also says, *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Where we fail, He prevails! He will give you the grace to forgive and He will give you the grace to forget, if you will bring it to Him. 1 Peter 5:7 – *"Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."* If you will bring it to Him, He can really make the past the past! **Hatred and anger must be forsaken!** Ephesians 4:26-27 gives serious warning concerning anger within our lives. It allows our adversary, the devil, a foothold from which he can attack every area of our lives! You MUST bring your bitterness to the Lord!
- 4. Conclusion.** Are you afflicted with a root of bitterness? If so, then let me challenge you to bring it before the Lord and let Him dig it out of your life. Your part is to confess your hurt to the Lord and seek to forgive the offending party. God's part is to give you the grace needed to make that a reality in your life. Don't let that root of bitterness live another minute! Of course, some are bitter against others and maybe even against God and they know it, but they have no intentions of forgiving or forgetting, choosing rather to seethe in their anger and to feel sorry for themselves. If that describes you friend, then you are in danger. You need to seek the Lord for your own forgiveness and restoration, so you can begin the healing process. Perhaps there is someone here

who needs to get up and go to another Brother or Sister and say, "I'm sorry for what I said or what I did. Please forgive me!" That would be a blessing! Still others are harboring a hurt and nursing a wounded spirit and the person you are hurt at doesn't even know they have done anything to you. The best thing you can do is to get before the Lord and deal with that matter in your own life. If you can't get over it, then do what the Bible says and go to that Brother or that Sister and talk it over in a spirit of humility and love. I feel I have done what the Lord asked me to do this morning. I have delivered the mail. Now, it is up to you to read it and to do what the Lord is speaking to your heart. Let's be honest with our own hearts and with one another. Until we deal with our roots of bitterness, the power of God and the ability of the Spirit of God to convict hearts, save sinners and move in power will be hindered.