April 16/17, 2016

# Good Leader, Bad Leader

*Courage to Lead Series*

**1 Samuel 24:1-22**

Pastor Bryan Clark

So, if you could get away with anything, what would you do? If you could get away with *anything*, what would you do? I would suggest to you that most people in our culture today are not guided by a deep sense of moral conviction. They're guided by the limits in each environment of what they think they can get away with. Now it would be easy to say, "Well, I'm not like that at all," so let's think about it a little differently. Let's imagine a high school student who is one way in high school under the umbrella of parents. That student goes off to college and suddenly engages in all kinds of behaviors that that student wasn't doing before. Why is that? The answer is simple: because they can get away with it. The environment has changed. It's not moral conviction; it's based on what I can get away with. Let's imagine that you're one way on Sunday at church but you're very different all week long at work. Why is that? The answer is simple: because at work, you can get away with it. Your behavior is regulated, not by internal moral conviction; it's just by the environment, "What can I get away with?" Maybe you're one way in public but you're very different in private. Maybe you're a super Christian in public but at home you're unkind, you're a bully, you're abusive. Why do you act that way at home? The answer is simple: because you can get away with it. So here's the deal as it relates to leadership: There's no question that as a leader gains more influence, more power and position, you can get away with much more. The more influence, the more power, the more position, the more you can get away with, which then is the concern: whether your life is regulated in public and in private, at church or at work, in any environment, is it regulated by a deep sense of moral conviction or is it more regulated on the basis of what you can get away with in any particular context?

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 24. If you're visiting with us, we're working our way through 1 Samuel. We find ourselves in chapter 24 this morning. A bit of a side note: if you're keeping track of this, there are two psalms that were written out of the story in chapter 24: Psalm 57 and Psalm 142. Verse 1:

> **Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there *was* a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. The men of David said to him, "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's *robe* secretly. It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed." David persuaded his men with *these* words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on *his* way.** (*NASB, 1 Samuel 24:1-7)

So Saul finishes up with the Philistines, which is where the story ended in chapter 23, receives word that David is hiding out in Engedi. Engedi literally means *the fountain of the wild goats*. Engedi was about ten miles north of Masada, right on the western bank of the Dead Sea—very rocky terrain, very difficult terrain, but Engedi was kind of an oasis. There was water; there was food, and it was known to be populated with these wild goats. So Saul gets three thousand chosen men—that would be saying they are regular army, professional soldiers—and off they go to get David. They get to an area called the Rocks of the Wild Goats and he comes to the sheepfolds in front of a cave. This actually would be relatively common. Shepherds had sheep out in this area. They would find a cave that was large enough that it would be a shelter if bad weather came in or during the night. And so they would take rocks, they would build kind of stone walls and make these sheep pens so in bad weather, at night, they could move the sheep in and then the cave is big enough that the shepherds and even the sheep can get in there if necessary. So it would be a logical place to assume that it's safe to go into. So, Saul goes in to relieve himself. Literally, the Hebrew is "to cover his feet." So he went into the cave to defecate. Now if you're unfamiliar with the terminology, number two, not number one. (*laughter*) Words you never thought you'd hear in a sermon. (*laughter*)

So Saul goes in; David and his men are in there. Now it's probably not all four, five, six hundred men. Several texts have told us they would divide up and hide but David and some of his men are in there. They're clearly somewhere in the shadows and Saul doesn't see them. David's men see this as their opportunity. Saul has made their lives miserable; Saul has made David's life miserable. This is the Lord handing over Saul on a platter. "*Take him out. This is your time to be king. Let's be done with this*." Now they offer a quote that I would say is at least suspect. They identify: **The Lord said, "Behold I am about to give your enemy into your hand and you shall do to him as it seems good to you."** Now we certainly have nowhere in the Samuel text where the Lord ever said that to David. Maybe it's something that Jonathan said. Maybe it's something that David interpreted. Maybe the men are just taking some liberty with something they heard. It's hard to tell. It's hard to imagine that God referred to Saul as "David's enemy" because later in the text, he's very clear that's not the case. So let's just say the men are embellishing in order to motivate David that God has offered up Saul*," This is your chance! Take him out*!" Now if you're David's men, that actually makes sense. "*Let's get this thing over with*." So David gets up; he ends up cutting off a corner of Saul's robe. It's likely Saul took his robe off to do his business, laid it aside, and that made this possible, but then the text says that David's heart convicted him. Literally it's that his heart *condemned* him. So it raises an interesting question: What was it that David did or was about to do that caused this deep conviction? Now the way the English reads makes it really clear it was because he cut off a corner of the robe. But the Hebrew isn't nearly that clear, and I don't think that's what it was. As a matter of fact, as the text unfolds I think that becomes more obvious. This is actually really important to get right because this text sets up next week's story, which sets up the following week's story, so all of this is kind of a series. I think David's conviction is spelled out more, then, in verse 6:

> **So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed."**

There's no question that phrase, **stretch out my hand against him** means to kill him. It'll come up again in the text pretty quick. I think what David is saying is that when his men proposed the idea, David was *in*. I think he got up with the full intent of killing Saul. But somewhere in the process of making this happen, the Lord convicted his heart that he did not have the liberty to kill God's anointed. For good or for bad, Saul was still the Lord's anointed. David said it twice in verse six. He

did not have permission to take justice upon himself and kill the Lord's anointed. So David is convicted. Rather then, he cuts off a corner of the robe, which will be critical to the point he's trying to make here in just a moment. David goes back; he tells his men basically what he said there in verse six, and they are persuaded. Again, I think it's a testimony to David's leadership that he is able to persuade these men who have suffered dearly because of Saul that, "*It's not our position to kill the Lord's anointed*." He persuaded them; they agreed, and Saul leaves the cave. Verse 8:

> **Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but *my* eye had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.' Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it.** (Vs. 8-11)

So David waits until Saul gets a certain distance away—certainly it's a calculated risk—maybe far enough away they could escape if they needed to. But he cries out to Saul and he identifies himself. Saul turns around and it's a very interesting moment where David bows before Saul as the anointed king, showing Saul deep respect as king. So David calls out to him and basically asks him, "Why do you listen to people that tell you I'm trying to do you harm?" And then he tells him, "That's simply not true," that he had every opportunity in the cave to kill him but chose not to. He simply will not stretch out his hand against him. Why? Because **he is the Lord's anointed**. He refers to him as his **father**; it is his father-in-law. There's suddenly these affectionate terms used—David for Saul and Saul back to David. It's a very interesting part of the story. So it's very clear when David holds up a part of the robe and identifies, "I was close enough to kill you. I cut off part of your robe, but I will not kill the Lord's anointed." He clearly says, "I'm not rebellious; I have not sinned," which tells us that the conviction earlier was not about cutting off the robe. He's holding that piece up and he's saying he has not done anything wrong. What he is saying is, "I could have killed you. Here's the evidence." But he chose not to, which then raises an interesting question: What is it in David's belief system that caused him to be convicted in this moment and not kill Saul?

One of the unique distinctives of a king in the ancient world is: a king was virtually a law unto himself. He was really not accountable to anyone. Therefore the king could get away with anything, which creates high risk. Saul slaughtered, in cold blood, eighty-five priests and every man, woman and child in the town of Nob. Why? Because he could! He could do virtually anything and get away with it. What would make David different as a king? It would be a lesson he would learn in the wilderness—that just because I can get away with something doesn't make it morally right. There has to be some sort of an internal moral compass that tells me even when I can get away with it, that doesn't make it right. David's men had said, "Do what seems good to you." That's code language for, "Kill him! You can get away with it. It's your day to be king." David chose not to. Why? He tells you in the following text:

> **May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out** [Literally that's 'come forth']**? Whom are you**

**pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."** (Vs. 12-15)

Verse twelve is very important to understand. The reason David did not choose to kill Saul was that he had a strong belief that God is the judge. At the end of the story, God sorts it out. God is in charge of justice. God will sort it out between David and Saul. David nowhere says, "You know, Saul, really, it's okay. You know, no big deal. You haven't done anything wrong." He doesn't say anything like that. As a matter of fact, what he says is very strong—that Saul has been wicked; he has been evil! He has done all this stuff to David, but David is going to leave it in the hands of God, which raises an interesting question: What happens to a modern day culture when God is pushed to the sideline and we convince ourselves that God is not a God of judgment—that there is no absolute truth, there is no absolute morality? All roads lead to God and at the end of the day, God is only a God of love. Everybody chooses their own way and when they get to God, God gives them all a big hug and, "Let's all be friends."

People in our culture espouse that view because they're convinced that view will create a utopia. If God is just a God of love, if there is no judgment, if we all get along, it will be a beautiful place! I would suggest to you that when God is pushed to the curb and we lose our sense of a God of judgment, we lose our sense of true accountability. It doesn't create a utopia; it creates the polar opposite. It creates a culture of chaos. I would also suggest to you, very strongly, that history lands on my side. There is virtually no example in the history of the world where a culture has ever pushed God to the curb, believed that there is no judgment, and they've created some sort of a utopia. What happens when a culture believes that is, you don't get a David; you get a Saul. If people begin to believe at the end of the day there's no accountability, there's no judgment, there's no justice, there's no holy God, then I'm only limited by what I can get away with. "Might makes right." Whoever's in charge will get away with whatever he or she needs to get away with in order to get his or her way. If I believe at the end of the story nobody's held accountable, then that means the only way for justice is I have to mediate justice now. "Vengeance is mine," sayeth the person who believes there's no judgment in the end. If there's no judgment, if there's no sorting out, if there's no justice in the end, then if somebody wounds me, if somebody hurts me, if somebody mistreats me, it's up to me to mediate out justice now. So what you create is a culture of violence; you create a culture of anger—you create a culture of *an eye for an eye*! If there's no accountability in the end, then there must be accountability now and we'll take it to the streets and get it. What you create is an intolerant, angry, bloody, chaotic culture—and out of that culture arises someone who will take charge. "Might makes right," and good and evil will simply be defined by what that person can get away with.

That pattern has repeated itself in history over and over and over again. What allows us to *love our neighbor as ourselves*, what allows us to *turn the other cheek*, what allows us to *forgive* is a belief that, at the end of the story, God's in charge of justice. God's in charge of judgment. God will sort it out in the end and, if I believe that, then I leave it to God and I'm able to be guided by an internal moral compass. That's what David is saying. He's saying it's not his responsibility to mediate out judgment. Saul is God's anointed; he leaves it with God. Then he quotes this proverb *that wickedness flows out of the wicked*—literally *comes forth from the wicked.* What David is saying is the reason Saul is doing wicked things is because he's wicked and God will judge that. God will sort it out. He asks the question, "To whom does the king come forth?" It's the exact same word. So out of the wicked comes forth wickedness. Who does the king come forth from? Is it a **dead dog**? Is it a **single flea**? In other words, who would rally three thousand soldiers to kill an innocent man

who has done nothing against him? Saul has so devalued David, based on how he's treating him and pursuing him, it's as if David has no more value than a dead dog and in an ancient culture a dog wasn't like little Fifi, our pet. A dog was considered kind of a mangy nuisance—so a dead dog or a single flea sitting on that dog. I mean really, the question is what kind of a person does that to someone who is completely innocent? Answer: a wicked person—and ultimately God will deal with that. God will expose that; God will reveal that. Verse 16:

> **When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and *yet* you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.** (Vs. 16-22)

So after David gives this rather long appeal to Saul, Saul has this amazing moment of clarity. He even refers to David as **my son**. David called him "my father" and Saul calls back, "my son". He's his son-in-law and there is this moment of clarity. Saul weeps, "What am I doing?" He identifies that David has been righteous. He's been wicked. David has been good; he's been bad. He identifies that if Saul really was David's enemy, David would have killed him.

Now think about this: we've seen this in the previous texts. Saul has been living in fear that at any moment, David is going to ambush him out of the shadows. He's actually said that multiple times. This man has been living in fear for years and now he finds out that actually David has never been pursuing him. David has never wanted to kill him. David has consistently tried to do the honorable thing. And he identifies now, if Saul was David's enemy, he would have killed him. David has demonstrated clearly that he has been faithful and loyal. So Saul identifies that David has done right; David is good; David will be the next king; David will sit on the kingdom. He asks for basically the same covenant that Jonathan asks for. David agrees. Saul goes home; David continues to hide. The big question as it relates to Saul is: is this a true moment of repentance or is Saul simply sorry? There's no way to answer the question until we see what happens in the following chapters.

As far as kind of wrapping this up this morning, here's a couple of things to think about: Again, in the ancient world, a king was a law unto himself. He answered to no one. Therefore he could get away with anything. You see that all through the ancient world. As a result, Saul did many evil things that cost thousands of people their lives. What would make David different? The answer is that David would learn in the *Wilderness School of Leadership* that you must be guided by something more than what you can get away with. There must be this internal moral compass that guides you in decisions you must make and it is built on this foundation of understanding that God is holy...that God is in charge...that God is the judge! And whether I can get away with it or not doesn't make it right. I ultimately answer to the judge and whether I'm in public or in private—whether I'm in one environment or another—I need to be guided by an internal moral compass where I choose what's right simply because it's right.

It is easy in our culture to be one way in one environment and be very different in another environment and all of that is really about, "What can I get away with?" So I'm one way at church; I'm some other way at work. I'm one way in public; I'm another way in private. I'm super Christian at church and I'm not such a super Christian at home. All of that reflects that I'm not so much guided by deep moral convictions but rather, depending on my context, "What can I get away with?" So here's the deal: Until you look at your life and see a clear pattern that your life is guided not by the environment, but by a deep moral conviction at home, at work, at church, in your hobbies, in public and in private, until there is a consistent pattern that your life is guided by deep moral convictions, you are simply not ready for more spiritual influence as a leader. The truth is the more influence, the more power, the more position you have as a leader, the more you can get away with. That's the risk. And unless somewhere along the way, typically in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*, you have learned that your life must be guided by something more, by something deeper, this deep sense of moral conviction that whether anybody else is watching or not, I must do the right thing simply because it's the right thing. Until there is that pattern in your life, you are just not ready for more spiritual influence.

*Our Father, we are sobered again this morning by the story of David and Saul. Lord, the story of Saul reminds us what happens when someone is free to do whatever he or she pleases. God, history would tell us, most of the time that ends up with bad things. God, you have called us to be Christ followers and to influence others for Jesus, to be leaders, to make a difference in this world. God, my prayer is that we would learn what it means in every environment of our lives to do the right thing simply because it is morally right to do so. God, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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Bryan Clark

## Opening Discussion

1. In your opinion, do most people operate out of a deep sense of moral conviction or do they simply live within the boundaries of what's acceptable in society? In other words, if they could get away with anything, how would that change the choices they make?

2. One way to think about why we do what we do is to look at how we live our lives in various environments. For example, are you different at work than you are at church? Are you different in public than you are in private? Are you different at work than you are at home? If the answer is yes to any of these questions it's because you can get away with more in one environment than the other. What does that tell you about yourself?

3. A big risk in leadership is that the more leadership influence you have (position and power) the more you can get away with. If you are not guided by a strong moral compass as a leader then it means the more influence you get the higher the risk of bad behavior. Does more leadership influence change people or simply reveal what was really there all along?

## Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 24:1-7. (Psalms 57 and 142 were written out of this incident). What do you think happened in that cave? Why was David convicted by his conscience? How easy would it have been to justify killing Saul in the cave?

2. Read I Samuel 24:8-15. How does David clarify what he could have done (considered doing) and why he didn't do it? What guided his decision?

3. What do you think happens to a culture when it minimalizes or dismisses the idea of a God of Judgement? Does the culture become more loving or more violent? Why?

4. In the ancient world the King was a law unto himself. He could get away with about anything as evidenced by Saul slaughtering men, women and children in Nob. What is God teaching David so David will be a different King from Saul?

5. What do we learn from David's decision about how we handle our own situations? What is the difference between what we can get away with and what is morally right?

6. Read I Samuel 24:16-22. How do you explain Saul's reaction? Is Saul sorry in your opinion or truly repentant?

7. How do the principles of legalism and grace fit into this discussion? Which is internal and which is external? How does legalism help us when we get into situations where we know we can get away with sinful behavior? How does grace guide us differently through the same situations?

## Application

1. Examine all environments of your life. Are you different in different environments? Why is that? Is it because your behavior matches what you can get away with in each environment? If so, what does that tell you about yourself?

2. If you tend to do what you can get away with in various contexts, what does that tell you about how you will respond with more power and position?

3. What is necessary in terms of what controls your behavior for you to be used by God as a spiritual leader?


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