September 24/25, 2016

One Step at a Time

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 2:1-32

Pastor Bryan Clark

Back home we have a John Deere 317 lawn tractor—pretty good lawn tractor, manufactured in 1980, so it's getting a little bit old, needs a little tender loving care now and then. About a month ago Patti was mowing and all of a sudden the mower deck stopped working, so I took it into the shop, took the deck off, and tore it apart. There are three blades, so there are three deck bearings and one of the set of bearings had blown out. I thought, "This is kind of an obscure part and this is a thirty-six-year-old lawn tractor so I wonder..." I went in the house, got on eBay, in less than five minutes found the part—new old stock—had it ordered, had it paid for, on its way. I went on with my day. Now there are two amazing things in that story. One is that I actually made technology work. (*Applause*) Yeah, that's probably the more unbelievable part of the story actually. (*laughter)* The second is, that's just really remarkable, that in this world we can have something like that instantly—instant information, instant shopping, instant music, instant maps. Thirty years ago, none of that would have even been thought possible. Yet now you have a whole generation who has grown up and they're like, "Well, duh." That's all they've ever known. Now there's a lot of good to that but there is a danger in thinking, then, everything in life should work like that. There are a lot of things in life that aren't instant. As a matter of fact, I would suggest to you, the things that matter the most still take time. You cannot cultivate instant relationships. You cannot instantly have integrity and character. You cannot instantly be spiritually mature, and you absolutely cannot instantly be prepared for leadership. There are still things that take time.

Now some of you as you sit there this morning may think, "I'm ready to be a leader," and you're frustrated because you haven't been given more influence somewhere. But here's something to think about: Maybe God doesn't agree. Maybe God wants to use you to be a world changer but today you're just not ready. He's got things He still needs to do to prepare you and shape you for your assignment. This one thing we know for sure: No matter what your circumstances are this morning, if you have not learned to be faithful and obedient in your circumstances such as they are today, you're not ready for more. And that's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 2. Wouldn't it be correct, if you were here last week, that at the end of chapter one there was this feeling that David is "this close" to finally being king of Israel? It has been over ten long years in the *Wilderness School of Leadership* but Saul is dead; Saul's three sons are dead. David is "this close". We could not have possibly imagined it would be seven more long years before David will sit on that throne. Chapter 2, verse 1:

> **Then it came about afterwards that David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?" And the LORD said to him, "Go up." So David said, "Where shall I go up?" And He said, "To Hebron." So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. And David brought up his men who were with him, each with his household; and they lived in the cities of Hebron. Then the men of Judah came and there anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul." David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said to them, "May you be blessed of the LORD because you have shown this kindness to Saul your lord, and have buried him. Now may the LORD show**

lovingkindness and truth to you; and I also will show this goodness to you, because you have done this thing. Now therefore, let your hands be strong and be valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."
(*NASB, 2 Samuel 2:1-7)

So David is in Ziklag. Saul and his sons are dead. The opening phrase of the chapter basically means some time has passed and David inquires of the Lord. If you were with us in 1Samuel, you know that this is really important language. In 1Samuel we saw this pattern that when David inquired of the Lord, it was reflective of David being tuned into the voice of God—learning to be a good follower in order that he might be a good leader. This was a really good sign. There were other times in 1Samuel where I think David was not wanting to be rebellious; he was not wanting to disobey; he was not wanting to just do his own thing, but he struggled from self-sufficiency—and sometimes with the best of intentions he just plowed forward and often got himself into significant messes. So this language has come to tell us that this is the time when David is dialed in and very sensitive to the voice of God. So this is a really good sign. David wants to know, "What do I do? Do I go back to the land of Israel? Do I go back to Judah?" God's answer is, "Yes." "Where do I go?" "The city of Hebron." Hebron is about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. It's down in the lower part of the land of Israel. Now remember, the Philistines have pretty much conquered the northern part. About all that's left is the southern part, a single tribe that's referred to as Judah, and Hebron is a significant city. It was right outside of Hebron where Abraham and Sarah are buried, Isaac and Rebecca are buried, Jacob and Leah are buried, so it's a very significant place. This is also David's hometown area and it's the home area of his two wives. So it all makes sense. When David says, **go up to**, typically the text means *to go to war*. The Hebrew literally says "go up into" which then means to live there, to settle—he's finally going home again. So he goes, takes his family, settles in, and they anoint him king of Judah.

Now that's only king over one tribe in the south—that's all that is. You remember when David was at Ziklag, he won the favor of Judah by attacking their enemies, by protecting them, by giving them the spoils of his victories. You remember the whole time he was doing that, he was lying to the king of the Philistines and his lies got him in all kinds of trouble, but he certainly won the favor of the people of Judah and they quickly make him king. He settles in and somebody tells him of the heroic deed of the men of Jabesh-gilead. Now there's a long history with Jabesh-gilead. First of all, they were relatives of Saul. You remember then, Jabesh-gilead is to the east of the Jordan River. So the Jordan River made kind of a natural protective boundary to the nation but there were a few cities yet east of that. So they were very vulnerable to attack from the Ammonites which were yet east of them. So as soon as Saul becomes king the Ammonites attack; word comes to Saul and Saul attacks. This is the battle when I referred to it as *Saul's finest hour*. Saul was dialed into God. The nation won a tremendous victory. Everything was wonderful. Samuel was on board, and Jabesh-gilead was delivered. It was a great moment! When Saul then lost to the Philistines, the Philistines cut off his head, the heads of his sons, and took their bodies and pinned them to a wall to basically make sport of them. The men of Jabesh-gilead heard this, crossed the Jordan, went into Philistine territory, took down the bodies of Saul and his sons, took them back with them, burned the bodies and buried the bones. That was all in the last couple of chapters of 1Samuel. So that's what they're referring to: that the men of Jabesh-gilead had done this brave and noble deed, and David reaches out to them and expresses a blessing to them for what they have done. He also promises to protect them and be there for them and encourages them to be strong and valiant. At this time, most of the north belongs to the Philistines. About all that remains in the north is yet east of the Jordan River. So Jabesh-gilead and a few cities are basically all that's left there so this is a very strategic move to not only honor them for doing the right thing, which is very kingly, but it also is beginning to build an

alliance with those in the north in order to spread out his kingdom. So everything looks pretty good until we get to verse eight. **But**... Don't you just hate that word sometimes? **But**...in this case that is seven years right there.

> **But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. He made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, even over all Israel. Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he was king for two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. The time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.**
>
> (Vs. 8-11)

So if you go back to 1Samuel when Saul was anointed king, it lists his three sons. Those three sons all died in battle. Ish-bosheth was born shortly after that, so Ish-bosheth was born while Saul was king. Why Ish-bosheth was not in the battle is unknown but if you see how he's portrayed in these chapters, most people think he was kind of cowardly and simply wasn't made for battle. So he stays home and Abner puts him on the throne. Now it would make sense from a human point of view that Ish-bosheth would be the next king. That's how it would work, down through the family line. But in the sovereignty of God, God said Saul's family is out; David's family is in. So now you have this weird tension between human activity and the sovereignty of God. There's no question Abner's running the show, not Ish-bosheth. Abner is the commander of the army. Abner is a warrior; he is a force and he needs someone in Saul's family to be king or he's no longer in power. Now we know Abner. We know him all the way back from when David had his encounter with Goliath. Abner is Saul's cousin. He's the commander of the army and when David defeated Goliath, it was Abner that went out and found David and brought him back to Saul when Saul asked the question, "Who is this young man?"

We have another encounter later in the story. It has to do with the second cave story in 1Samuel. You remember, David takes his nephew and they go down to Saul's camp in the middle of the night. They sneak into Saul's camp and get all the way to Saul's head. There Saul's spear is stuck in the ground and they take Saul's spear in order to validate that they were close enough to kill Saul. Who's in charge of security? Answer: Abner. We're even told that Abner was sleeping right next to Saul. So if you remember the story, then when the sun rises and David calls down to Saul's camp, he immediately engages in some trash talk with Abner. He says, "Who's in charge of security? Seems to me he didn't do a very good job. While he was supposed to be watching the king, he was sound asleep and I could have killed the king. And I can validate my story; here's Saul's spear." It had to have been an absolutely humiliating moment for Abner. As a matter of fact, David went so far as to say, "If it was me, I would kill him." So there's a history between David and Abner. There's no way Abner's rolling over and letting David take charge. So Abner puts Ish-bosheth on the throne to the north. If you look at the cities that are described, basically over a period of five years, Ish-bosheth, with Abner's help, is taking back these cities and consolidating them in order to have somewhat of a northern presence, which is referred to as Israel. So the timeline is saying it took five years to do that, so then for two years Ish-bosheth actually reigned as king over that consolidated area. In the meantime, for seven and a half years, down south, David had been king over a single tribe—the tribe of Judah. So what happens next is simply describing the civil war that took place somewhere during that time frame. Verse 12:

> **Now Abner the son of Ner, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon with the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul. And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David**

went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon; and they sat down, one on the one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool. Then Abner said to Joab, "Now let the young men arise and hold a contest before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." So they arose and went over by count, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. Each one of them seized his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, [which means place of the daggers] **which is in Gibeon. That day the battle was very severe, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.** (Vs. 12-17)

So basically you have Abner, who is Saul's cousin, picking a fight with Joab, who was David's nephew. So Joab's mother and David were brother and sister. So Abner brings troops down; Joab brings troops up. They meet at this pool. So basically there's a pool of water between them. They're on both sides and they enter into what was called a representative combat. Now this seems odd to us but was relatively common in the ancient world—especially in a civil war like this. Why kill all your soldiers? Pick your top champions, have them fight; winner take all. So that's what the David and Goliath story was. The Philistines put forth their champion; Israel was to put forth their champion; winner take all. That's what this was: twelve on one side, twelve on the other side. So they engage in a little trash talking and they agree—twelve for the twelve tribes of Israel. So the twelve champions from both sides meet in the middle and they all kill each other—all twenty-four of them dead. It's a draw, which means then that the troops go at it and Abner basically suffers great defeat and Joab and his troops win.

Now the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab and Abishai and Asahel; and Asahel was as swift-footed as one of the gazelles which is in the field. Asahel pursued Abner and did not turn to the right or to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Is that you, Asahel?" And he answered, "It is I." So Abner said to him, "Turn to your right or to your left, and take hold of one of the young men for yourself, and take for yourself his spoil." But Asahel was not willing to turn aside from following him. Abner repeated again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?" However, he refused to turn aside; therefore Abner struck him in the belly with the butt end of the spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died on the spot. And it came about that all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still. (Vs. 18-23)

So basically Joab and his army win. Abner and his troops take off running; Joab's people give chase and Asahel, Joab's brother, was the fastest of all of them and he's beginning to catch up to Abner. Now Abner is a seasoned warrior and he knows that Asahel is no contest for him so he tries to get him to stop. "Turn aside; find any of the dead bodies; take whatever you want, but just stop and go home." What's interesting about this text is that they all know each other. They know their relatives; they know their families; they know their names. This is a civil war; it's brother against brother so he tries to get him to stop. His big concern is: if I kill Asahel, which I will if he catches me, then I will answer to Joab and Joab was a seasoned warrior and that's a fight he didn't want. But Asahel will not stop. He basically catches him and Abner kills him on the spot. At the end of that paragraph, there's this sense in which they all gather around and they see the dead body of Asahel and there's just kind of this moment of, "What are we doing here?" There had to have been those moments in our own civil war where it was brother against brother, cousin against cousin, family against family; we're killing each other! And there had to have been these moments where

people asked, 'What are we doing?" That's exactly what this moment is. There's a sense in which at this moment it's not the Philistines; it's not the Moabites; it's not the Ammonites. We're killing each other! What are we doing? But then the chase continues.

> **But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner, and when the sun was going down, they came to the hill of Ammah, which is in front of Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. The sons of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became one band, and they stood on the top of a certain hill. Then Abner called to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the end? How long will you refrain from telling the people to turn back from following their brothers?" Joab said, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely then the people would have gone away in the morning, each from following his brother." So Joab blew the trumpet; and all the people halted and pursued Israel no longer, nor did they continue to fight anymore. Abner and his men then went through the Arabah all that night; so they crossed the Jordan, walked all morning, and came to Mahanaim.** (Vs. 24-29)

So basically the chase continues. Abner gets far enough along that they regroup. The troops from Benjamin gather on the hill. He calls down to Joab and says, "How long are we going to do this? If we keep doing this, we're all going to kill each other and then we'll have nothing in the end and it will all be better?" Basically Joab listens to what he has to say. He engages in a little trash talk and says, "If we would have kept chasing you, we would have wiped you out. But I listened to what you had to say." He blows his horn; the fighting stops, and everybody goes back home. Verse 30:

> **Then Joab returned from following Abner; when he had gathered all the people together, nineteen of David's servants besides Asahel were missing. But the servants of David had struck down many of Benjamin and Abner's men, so that three hundred and sixty men died. And they took up Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb which was in Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men went all night until the day dawned at Hebron.** (Vs. 30-32)

So at the end they do a tally. David and Joab lost twenty men; Abner lost three hundred sixty men. So where does the story go from here? Well, we'll have to find out next week, but a couple of things to think about as we wrap this up: One of the things that is just so sobering about this story is you can track it all the way back forty years earlier. There was a moment when the nation of Israel rejected God as king and said, "We want a human king." God was very clear. "They have rejected Me because they want a human king like the other nations." God comes back to them through Samuel and begs, pleads with them to rethink that decision because there will be serious consequences if they insist on that choice. But the leaders of Israel insisted and God gave them what they asked for. How many thousands of men, women and children died because of that decision? One can only imagine how the story could have been different. People live in communities and communities form cultures and cultures matter. When they decided, "We don't want God in our business anymore," two generations later, people that were not part of that decision were now suffering violence and dying in the streets because of a decision made forty years before them.

We're also reminded that leadership matters. What if Saul would have been a godly, faithful, courageous king? 1Samuel 11 is just a glimpse of the possibility of what could have been. How many of these men, women and children that died bloody painful deaths could have thrived had Saul been a different leader? We said it several times in 1Samuel: *When bad leaders get position*

and power, lots of people get hurt. There was a reminder that when leaders don't step up and lead, there is a price tag, and you wake up one morning and brothers are killing brothers; family is killing family; people of one nation are killing other people of the same nation in the streets because of a breakdown in leadership—to lead well.

Lastly, there is just the story of David. Now it will be seventeen long years of waiting, of misery, of God preparing him. David was basically minding his own business, being a good faithful shepherd. He didn't ask for any of this. Then Samuel comes along and Samuel anoints him future king of Israel, and from that moment on David's life has been absolutely miserable. God is busy shaping and changing and working and preparing David. David will eventually sit on the throne and he will be the greatest king in the history of Israel, and the people that will live under the reign of David will know a peace and prosperity they can't even begin to imagine at this moment in the story. There is this strange dynamic between the sovereignty of God: God has a plan and He is working His plan and it will change these people's lives dramatically. But we're also talking about people made in the image of God who exercise their own will and they make choices, and those people are causing all kinds of pain and suffering and violence in the streets. So you have this weird tension between the sovereignty of God and the choices people make, and somehow all of this will play out and God's plan will be fulfilled. But at this moment in the story there is nothing David can do about any of it except he can seek to be faithful and obedient in his circumstances. The rest is up to God.

In the New Testament, 1Peter chapter five says, "**Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you at the proper time.**" The story of David is simply an Old Testament narrative version of that same verse. All David can do is wait until it is God's time to put him on the throne. But in the meantime, his assignment is to be faithful and obedient every day—one step at a time—until it's time to be on the throne. I don't know what defines your world today. I don't know what the circumstances are. You might wish your circumstances were totally different—whether it's your marriage, your family, your job, your health; whatever it is that you might wish your circumstances were really different. The fact is: There isn't much you can do today to change that except you can seek to be obedient and faithful and do the right thing in the midst of your circumstances today, because this we know for certain: If you're not able or willing to be faithful and obedient in your circumstances such as they are today, you are not ready for more. **Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and *He* will exalt *you*...humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you *at the proper time.***

> *Our Father we continue to kind of struggle in our spirits with the David story. Maybe we struggle with the David story because we just don't want to think that could be our story. But, Lord, sometimes the path to leadership is a long and difficult process of change and growth. God, I have no doubt, seated in this auditorium this morning there are some world changers. But, God, right now they're not ready for that assignment and You're taking them through the wilderness school of leadership. You're changing them; You're shaping them; You're molding them: You're preparing them. God, in whatever the circumstances are that any of us find ourselves, God, help us to be faithful and obedient today in order that You might use us to do something more at some point in the future. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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One Step at a Time

Courage to Lead

2 Samuel 2:1-32

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Opening Discussion

1. What are some examples of things in our culture that years ago took time but today happen in an instant? How might this expectation of instant this and that create an unrealistic expectation in other areas of our lives?

2. What are some things in life that must take time? Are there any shortcuts? How do we best pursue these areas in a culture that wants everything now?

3. People may be put in positions of leadership very quickly or may have a leadership title but does that mean that person is ready to lead? What is necessary to truly cultivate the character to be an effective and responsible leader?

Bible Study

1. Read II Samuel 2:1-11. When we read that both Saul and Jonathon are dead it seems like the road is clear for David to become king (finally). Yet, we find out that there will be 7.5 years of civil war before David will finally be king over all of Israel. What do we learn from this? What should we expect if God is going to use us in a significant way?

2. You can see the tension between the plan of God and the choices and ambition of humans like Abner. What is our part and what is God's part in this tension? Practically speaking, what does this look like on a daily basis?

3. Read II Samuel 2:12-32. What created the civil war? How is this civil war connected to the nation's choice to reject God as king and call for a human king (See I Samuel 8)?

4. What are the real consequences when bad leaders get position and power? Who pays the price? Did God warn them? Does God warn us? So what does this mean for us today?

5. David will only reign over Judah for 7.5 years during which time many will die in their civil war. In the midst of a lot of things David could not control, what could he do to be faithful day by day? What would be necessary for David to be faithful in these

frustrating circumstances for 7.5 years? How does the David story line up with what Peter states in I Peter 5:6?

Application

1. If you are serious about wanting God to use you to make a significant difference in the world, what should you expect? Can you really become an effective leader without spending time in the wilderness school of leadership? Can anyone be an instant leader?

2. There might be all kinds of things you wish were different in your life today. What would it mean for you to simply be faithful and obedient in your circumstances such as they are today?

3. What does it mean to you to "humble yourself under the mighty hand of God" today?

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