October 22/23, 2016

Leaders and the Holiness of God

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 6:1-23

Pastor Bryan Clark

I have no doubt that this auditorium this morning is filled with people who are serious Christ-followers. Your faith matters to you; you love Jesus; you want Jesus to use you to make a difference in the world, and many of you with courage and faith are going to step out, and God is going to use you in significant ways! When God works through you to accomplish something great, with that will come reward. It's not a bad thing; actually there's nothing you can do about it; that's just the way it is. It comes in a hundred different ways—but therein lies the risk. It's very easy to start to listen to the voices. It's very easy to kind of fall in love with the applause. You start to believe the press clippings and pretty soon you start to change the way you see yourself. You start to think, "You know, seems to me God's just pretty lucky to have someone like me on His team." It begins to change your view of God and consequently changes your view of the people around you. Actually it even changes the way you treat the people around you, and before you know it, suddenly you've created a mess, with hurt people, the very people you're supposed to be leading.

Now it would be great this morning to say "if" this ever happens to you, but I'm going to change the language to WHEN it happens to you. There is nobody in the room that is so super-spiritual, you're somehow not vulnerable to this. If you're going to step out by faith and if God's going to use you in significant ways, it is going to mess with your head. It is going to happen and you're going to end up in one of those hurtful leadership moments when you realize, "I really made a mess of things." So one of the key issues in all of this is not so much "if" it happens or not, it's how you respond in those moments when you realize, "Somewhere I lost my way and the result is I have made a mess of things." How you respond in that moment will largely determine if God can continue to use you or if you have disqualified yourself. That's what we want to talk about this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter six. Last week in 2 Samuel chapter five we talked about these five glimpses of David that are really glorious celebrations of David as king. After twenty plus years of struggle and heartache, these are kind of the moments of great reward. I talked about the fact that they aren't in chronological order, they're more kind of thematically organized, but they're just five glimpses. If I was to try to figure out what I think is the correct order of events and then place chapter six where it fits, I think it would be like this: number one is that first paragraph where David is anointed king. I think number two would have been the battle with the Philistines, because the text says, "As soon as he was anointed king, they came and gathered for battle." After defeating the Philistines, I'm thinking it was the move on Jerusalem to take the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites. I'm thinking that then is followed by chapter six, moving the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, and then sometime after that is probably the building of this magnificent house for David by the king of Tyre. That's my best guess. So with that in mind, we pick up the storyline in chapter 6:

> **Now David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned *above* the cherubim. They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and**

Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart. So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark. Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of *instruments made of fir wood,* and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals. But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset *it*. And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God. David became angry because of the LORD'S outburst against Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. So David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?" And David was unwilling to move the ark of the LORD into the city of David with him; but David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. Thus the ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household. (*NASB, 2 Samuel 6:1-11)

This is kind of one of those classic Old Testament texts that unbelievers and skeptics go to in order to frame a view of God—that God is mean, He's judgmental, He's angry, He's vindictive, and He just wants to whack people. As a matter of fact, these are the passages that cause people to refer to the *God of the Old Testament,* as if the God of the Old Testament is somehow different from the God of the New Testament. Now I will grant you, these passages can be disturbing, but it depends on what lens you choose to look through to view the Old Testament. I would say when I view the Old Testament, what I see is a God that primarily is unimaginably long-suffering and patient, a God who is unimaginably merciful, gracious, forgiving and patient, with occasional glimpses of justice. You're talking about thousands and thousands of years with His own people, and pagans that seem determined to do everything that is offensive to God. Again and again and again, as a way of life, they offend God and they spit in His face, and they're filled with idolatry, and yet in the midst of that, God typically responds with grace and mercy and patience and long-suffering and forgiveness.

As a result of that, we have come to just presume upon grace. We don't find grace amazing; grace is the norm! It's as if God somehow should always act that way—that we should be allowed to live as we choose without consequence—because God's a god of grace. We're not amazed by grace. We're amazed by justice—and in those moments where God steps in with justice, we're shocked, and we think, "This was so unfair!" But that's because of the lens through which we view these stories. Before anybody in the room gets too high and mighty that God is such a "meany" I would suggest to you there's not a single person in this auditorium this morning that would put up with a fraction of what God puts up with—with patience and long-suffering, grace and mercy and forgiveness again and again and again. There is no one in this room that would put up with what God puts up with, but there are moments of justice, and those moments happen for a reason.

So what's happening in this passage? David has come off these magnificent stories of chapter five. After all of the struggle and the heartache and the disappointment, these are the reward years for David. What's happening with David is just absolutely magnificent. So David gets to this moment where he wants to move the ark of the covenant to the center of Jerusalem. The ark of the covenant represented the presence of God—the holiness of God. There is so much theology tied up in this ark with the mercy seat and the Day of Atonement and what God required. But a lot of it had to do with the holiness of God and as sinners, sinners can't just waltz into the presence of God as if there's no problem, which was the need for the Day of Atonement and the shedding of the blood of the

lamb and all that was necessary to represent that. All that was a foreshadowing of ultimately the coming of a Savior and the blood that would be shed from God Himself in order to atone for sin.

But the ark, by and large in the last number of decades, has been treated more like a rabbit's foot then a representative of the holy presence of God. All the way back to 1 Samuel 4, Eli's sons think it's a bright idea to take the ark of the covenant into battle. They lose the battle; the ark is captured by the Philistines. The ark comes back to Israel, but by this time Shiloh, the religious center, has been destroyed and the ark of the covenant is taken to the house of Abinadab and probably just put in storage—nobody knows quite for sure—for these many decades. Clearly, through the period of the time of Saul, God was the center of the nation but Saul didn't have much interest in that; there was no real sense of the holiness or the presence of God.

But now David, I think, genuinely wants to change that. David is coming off these great victories, and perhaps David's view of himself is changing, which is then changing his view of God. Perhaps David thinks that *David and God* will now rule Israel, and probably in that order. Now he can kind of use and manipulate God, put Him in the center of Jerusalem, and *David and God* will change the world. That is evidenced by the fact that David nowhere inquires of God—whether this is what God wants him to do; whatever David's motives were—we do know that.

We also see that the text emphasizes that David put the ark of the covenant on a *new cart*. The new cart is referred to twice in verse three and the "it" refers to it in verse four—so three times in two verses. And you say, "Why the obsession with the cart?" Well, stop and think about it. Who used a new cart to transport the ark of the covenant? Answer: 1 Samuel chapter six: the Philistines, the pagans. They didn't know any better. They were just trying to get rid of the ark, give it back to Israel, because God was judging them. But when you go back to the Law, God was very clear regarding the ark: No one touches it! When you move it, it's only to be moved by the Levites, the priestly tribe and they are to slide poles in the rings that are built in the side of the ark of the covenant, then to shoulder those poles and to move the ark of the covenant without touching it. Do it that way so it can't tip or fall off. David disregards all of that because David is now in charge, and he's moving the ark. And so they put it on a new cart; it hits the threshing floor, the ark of the covenant starts to fall off; Uzzah reaches up and touches it—which he knew he was forbidden to do—and immediately is struck dead by God. And that makes David angry! This is David's big parade. This is his big moment, and now all of it has come to a grinding halt when God struck Uzzah dead. So the text tells us David was really mad at God for doing this. But then his anger turns to fear, as he realizes, "What's next? What if God does that to me?" He is so filled with fear that he's thinking, "I don't think I want the ark in Jerusalem. I don't know what God's going to do next." He is so disturbed and confused by this moment that the ark of the covenant is diverted to the house of the Gittite, and it will remain there for three months. During that three months David will do some serious soul-searching to figure out what just happened here.

It's important to understand that David was losing some perspective. He was elevating his view of himself; he was diminishing the holiness of God, and sounding a little bit like going down the Saul path. I understand it's devastating to see Uzzah struck dead, but I also understand that if David travels the path of Saul, you're talking about thousands of men, women, and children that will die, just like under the reign of Saul. There is a lot at stake here. For many years under the reign of Saul, the holiness of God was set aside and people suffered the consequences. Now there appears to be some level of drift, and God steps in and says, "I won't have it! I'm the King and that's the way it's going to be!" Now you might think, "Oh God's on some sort of a big ego trip; it's God's way or no way!" Is that really what this is about? Is that ever really what it's about? Isn't it just possible

that God is longing to bless His people? This is what the story has always been about. "I will be your God; you will be My people. You walk in My ways and I will pour out blessing on you—so much blessing the pagans around you will see that the God of Israel is the one true God, and we want that God." But again and again the nation turned to idolatry. God just wants them to listen, to understand that He is God. He knows what He's doing. "My way is the way of life; listen to me!"

Think of this in a parenting model. Years ago when my three girls were under my roof and I was in charge of them as the parent, I wanted my girls—I expected my girls—to respect me. The reason was because I was on a huge ego trip and wanted to crush them. That's not what it was at all. It's because I love them. I wanted them to respect me because I wanted them to listen to me, because I wanted them to find life. I wanted them to understand: life is found in the ways of God, so listen to me. Trust me when I'm telling you: this is the way to travel through life, because, in the end, that's where life is found. This is no different. This is God saying, "I want you to understand I'm God. Listen to me, because I want to tell you where you'll find life. I want to bless you. I want to prosper you. I want to protect you, but for that to happen, you have to understand: I am holy and I am God, and that's the way this has to work."

So for three months David is processing and the ark is not in Jerusalem. We find in reading 1 Chronicles 15, which is kind of a companion volume that tells the same story but adds some details, that David realized that he had been reckless and careless with the ark. David realized, "I haven't inquired of God...I haven't asked of God. I didn't do it the way God says you're supposed to do it. I did this all myself. I messed up and so now this time it's going to be different." Verse 12:

> **Now it was told King David, saying, "The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, on account of the ark of God." David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And so it was, that when the bearers of the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David was dancing before the LORD with all *his* might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and the sound of the trumpet. Then it happened *as* the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. So they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. When David had finished offering the burnt offering and the peace offering, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts. Further, he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, both to men and women, a cake of bread and one of dates and one of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed each to his house.** (Vs.12-19)

So David figured out he's the one that messed up. As a matter of fact, David will say it better in his own words here in a little bit. But this time around he understood: we need to do this God's way, so every step was with the Levites and the poles and the sacrifices, just as God had required. What's interesting about this final journey into Jerusalem is David is not cowering in fear, wondering if God is going to whack somebody again. As a matter of fact it's just the opposite. He is like a child full of joy, dancing in the presence of God, because David clearly understands, "This was on me. I understand what I did. I've confessed that; I've repented of that." And David now knows that he's regained perspective and is just delighting in the presence of God as the ark is moved into the city.

Verse 16 is an interesting snapshot of Michal, the wife of David, the daughter of Saul. She sees David and the ark coming. David is twirling and dancing and carrying on, and she is not happy. As a matter of fact, she looks at her husband and *she despises him*. There are two window moments for Michal. One is in 1 Samuel, when she lowers David out the window of the house to escape because her father Saul wants to kill David. In that moment, she loves him—the text told us that. But now, years later, here's another window moment and things have changed. Her father's not the king anymore. Her family's not in charge anymore, and she looks at David dancing and she despises him.

Now on a side note, those of us that grew up in the fundamentalist movement were often taught this text as a defense for why dancing is evil. Because of Michal's response, that made the dancing evil. I just have to tell you, that is an absolutely ridiculous interpretation of the text. As a matter of fact, it turns the text on its head. God is delighted in David. It's Michal that has some deep problems, and we'll get to that in just a minute.

So David takes the ark into Jerusalem and puts it in the tent. It's an all out celebration. The people are thrilled. It's kind of a party. He gives them food and sends them all home. It's just a wondrous moment until he goes home:

> **But when David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants' maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!" So David said to Michal, "*It was* before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the LORD. I will be more lightly esteemed than this and will be humble in my own eyes, but with the maids of whom you have spoken, with them I will be distinguished." Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.** (Vs. 20-23)

David gets home. He's excited. Michal comes out to meet him and she pretty much lays it on him. He embarrassed himself; he shamed himself; he was undistinguished. As a matter of fact, the word for uncovered is basically a Hebrew word that means *exposed himself*. It has clear sexual overtones, and she accuses him of all kinds of things. Now it would be easy in this text to do a psycho-analysis of Michal and all she has been through, which is a lot. But that's just pure speculation. Sticking to the text, David responds that it was not foolish and shameless and sexual, but this was absolute pure delight in the presence of God. Why? Because for reasons David will never understand, God chose him. You remember David wasn't looking for this. David wasn't running for office. David was a shepherd, watching some sheep, and out of nowhere, Samuel shows up and anoints David the next king of Israel. David had nothing to do with God rejecting Saul. David only understood that God chose him to be King of Israel and to pour out his blessings on him—and he is celebrating that wondrous truth! David clearly understood his mistake in the first move of the ark, when he says he will actually even esteem himself lower yet, and wants to be more broken and humble before God. Clearly he's saying, "I get it! I get where I messed up. It messed with my head. It won't happen again, and I am going to be broken before God. God's the King and I'm the servant. God is great. I am not." But interestingly he says, "When I do that, then I will be more distinguished in the eyes of my people"—a very familiar message in the New Testament.

There is nowhere in this passage where Michal is ever referred to as the wife of David. She never refers to David, "my husband". It's always the "daughter of Saul" and a reference to the king. There's no question that the writer, once again, wants to draw a comparison between the line of Saul

and the line of David: Michal—like father, like daughter—she wanted David to be "the guy", to be a king, to act like a king, but she seemed to have no sense of the holiness of God, no sense of what it meant to worship God—very much like her father. And David reminds her, "Your father's line is out, and God has chosen me to be the next king, and I will do it with brokenness and with humility, giving glory to God." This is a pivotal moment that will set up a remarkable conversation in the next chapter, where God actually promises David, "Your dynasty will last forever!" You say, "Well that's kind of hyperbole; nobody's dynasty could last forever." It's not hyperbole. God will promise David, "Your dynasty will last forever." We'll talk about that next week.

What is the relevance of this text to us? I would say, after thirty-some years in a role as a spiritual leader, it's hard for me to imagine a more important lesson to learn—to understand if God uses you, there will be reward—you can't do anything about that. But it's how you choose to respond to that that matters. There's great risk in that. You start to kind of enjoy the applause. You start to listen to the voices and you start thinking, "God is just pretty lucky to have me on the team," and all of a sudden I start to change the way I view myself. I start to change the way I view God. I start to change the way I view the people around me. It starts to change the way I treat the people around me, and all of a sudden it's a mess, and I've hurt the very people I was called to lead. It's in that moment where we either face into that, and like David realized, "Wow, I really lost my way; I messed up. I lost sight of who's great and who's the servant—who's the king and who's the servant. I started thinking maybe it was me, but with confession and repentance I realized I've got to recalibrate, refocus, and get this figured out and move forward accordingly or God can't use me." The alternative in that moment is to play the victim. It's everybody else's fault. Everybody else messed up. I'm just kind of the victim, and it's not really my fault. Each time I do that, I take one small step down the path of Saul, and pretty soon I'm so far down that path, it will be very difficult for God to use me again.

Think about how this message is revisited again and again and again in the New Testament. Didn't Jesus say, "The first shall be last; the last shall be first," which is exactly what David just said? Didn't Jesus say, "If you're going to be a disciple of mine, then you have to learn to wash dirty feet"? Didn't Jesus say, "The greatest in the kingdom will have to be the servant of all"? Didn't John the Baptist say, "I must decrease so he may increase"? Didn't Paul say, "When I am weak, then I am strong"? Didn't Paul say, "Do not think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think, but have the attitude of Christ that caused him to leave the heavenlies and go to a cross for you"? And didn't Peter say, "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you at the proper time"? In order for God to use you and keep using you to do great things, you have to maintain your focus: He's great, I'm not! He's the king, I'm the servant! To God be the glory, because it's great things He has done!

Our Father, we celebrate that You do use us to accomplish great things in this world. But we acknowledge this morning that comes with risk, that we can lose our way. God, I know there are so many people in this room this morning who are serious about their Christian walk and with courage and faith they step out. God, You will use them in significant ways. God, help us all in those moments to be broken and humble, Lord, that we might remember, "To God be the glory," that we would not glory in ourselves. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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2 Samuel 6:1-23

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Opening Discussion

1. Do you see evidence in our culture that we have lowered our view of God and raised our view of ourselves? What are the signs of that in our culture?

2. Is it possible that over time we as Christians lose sight of our great need for a Savior and start to diminish our view of God and raise our view of ourselves? What would be the practical signs that this is happening?

3. One of the great risks of the rewards of leadership is that we start listening to the applause too much and start thinking we are something special rather than realizing God deserves the glory. How do we avoid this?

Bible Study

1. Read II Samuel 6:1-11. Compare Exodus 25:10-16; Numbers 4:15-20; I Chronicles 15:11-15. What happened and why?

2. How might the great moments recorded in II Samuel 5 have effected David's view of God and himself which led to the devastating moment in II Samuel 6:7? What do we learn from this?

3. What is different about the process in II Samuel 6:12-19? What do we learn about David? How is David different than Saul? Will our story be mostly defined by whether or not we make mistakes or by what we do when we realize we've errored?

4. Read II Samuel 6:20-23. While there may have been a lot of issues between David and Michal, the focus in the text is what? How does Michal represent the household of Saul and how is David different? What would you say is the big lesson David learned in this chapter?

Application

1. David's careless attitude towards the holiness of God was probably a result of all the rewards of leadership from chapter 5. What are some practical things you can do to maintain a right view of God and of yourself as God uses you to accomplish great things for Him?

2. What might be the modern day version of the David and Michal story? Not so much the marriage but the perspective of the proper behavior for a leader, especially a spiritual leader?

3. What made David different than Saul (and his family)? What do we learn from this that might prevent us from making the same mistakes Saul made?

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