October 29/30, 2016

The Leader's Prayer

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 7:1-29

Pastor Bryan Clark

Bad spiritual leaders tend to be characterized by insecurity and arrogance, and I would suggest to you those two things always go together. Show me an arrogant leader and I'll show you a leader who is deeply insecure. Good spiritual leaders are characterized by humility, but also with great confidence, and I believe those two things go together. Show me someone who understands true humility—I'll show you a confident leader. Now every serious Christ-follower in the room would say, "I want to be defined by humility and confidence." So how does that happen? Well there are two very important—I would say fundamental—things you need to know in order to be humble and confident as a Christ-follower, and we find them in our text this morning in 2 Samuel, Chapter 7.

If you have a Bible, I would like to invite you to turn with us to 2 Samuel, chapter 7. I mentioned the last couple of weeks, these chapters right here in 2 Samuel aren't necessarily in chronological order; as a matter of fact they probably are not. They're organized more accordingly to themes, as the writer's trying to develop certain theological themes along the way. Chapter 7 is unique in 2 Samuel. Some scholars believe it is one of the most significant chapters in the whole of the Old Testament. What makes it unique is most of the story in 1 and 2 Samuel is driven by the narrator. So the narrator is telling the story; you have some dialogue and some editorial comments but most of it is the narrator. It gets very different in chapter 7. Almost the entire chapter is what we would refer to as *direct speech*, which basically means there are two speeches that basically take up almost all of chapter 7. One is a speech by God; the second is a speech by David. The purpose of that technique in the narrative is it forces you to slow down. It's kind of like: slow down, take a deep breath, push the pause button and just wonder a little bit in amazement of what is actually happening here. So with that, verse 1:

> **Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you."**
>
> (*NASB, 2 Sam. 7:1-3)

So a couple things: We're introduced to Nathan, the prophet who will end up playing a significant role in the David story. David is at a time when the nation is at rest. This is significant! It probably is the first time that the nation has been at rest. All the way back when they left Egypt in slavery, until this moment there's always been conflict and war and battles and struggles; but for the first time they are actually in the land and they are at rest. When the nation asked for a human king, they asked specifically for a human king to fight their battles, that they might experience rest. But a human king could never deliver. So now with God as king and David as the servant, they have experienced this rest. There's peace and prosperity in the land. David is in his magnificent house of cedar. Most likely it was a stone house with cedar lining the interior, and that's why most scholars think this is probably much later in David's reign when this story takes place. But David is living in luxury. It's not a bad thing; it's not a wrong thing. David didn't ask for this house. God provided this house through the king of Tyre—it didn't cost his own people a single penny. But David has this sense in which he's uncomfortable that he is living in such luxury and the ark of the

covenant resides in a tent. Now this is quite a contrast from what Haggai the prophet wrote to the people of Israel and rebuked them because they lived in luxurious homes while the temple was in disrepair—a reflection of their own value system. But in this case David is in his luxurious palace and wants to do something for God. He mentions it to Nathan the prophet. David's motives are good; it sounds like the right thing to do and it sounds like Nathan is encouraging David to move forward on the project. Verse 4:

> **But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"** (Vs. 4-7)

So that very night God appears to Nathan and He speaks to him and He says, "Here's what I want you to tell David. 'David, did I ask you to build me a house?'" If you go back to Deuteronomy, when the nation landed in the Land of Promise, God would build a house, a temple. The word **house** in this chapter is used fifteen times; there's kind of a play in a literal house and then a figurative house like a dynasty. So God says, "When we get to the land, I will decide when it is to be built and who will build it." Because there was deep theology in the idea of the ark or God residing in a tent from Egypt all the way to the Land of Promise was the idea that these were sojourners; these were travelers. They were moving toward the Land of Promise but they really didn't have a land, a place that was their own until they landed in the Promised Land and there was rest in the land. So the idea of dwelling in a tent had theological meaning—that we're still in pursuit of the land. So now finally the ark of the covenant is in Jerusalem; David possesses Jerusalem, but God is saying, "It's not time." At a time of God's choosing, He will decide who builds it and when it is to be built.

Now I don't think this is a rebuke to David. I think David's motives are good. David is living in luxury; he's celebrating God's faithfulness. He wants to do something for God. But first of all, just think of the logic of this. God created the universe. God created the solar systems and the ocean. God created the mountains and the valleys and the beauty and the wonder of all that exists, so what exactly is David going to build that's going to impress God? Does he really think God's going to be impressed with a house of cedar? He's God! But there's more to it than that. There's always this temptation when God has been good and faithful to think, "I need to do something for God." All religion is built on the idea of, "What can we do for God?"...that maybe somehow I can do enough for God to somehow merit His favor. The important thing in this passage is God speaks to David and is very clear, "David, this relationship is not going to work that way. This is not religion. This is not going to be about what *you* can do for *Me*. This is going to be all about what *I* can do for *you*." And so God completely turns the conversation upside down.

> **"Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I**

commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."' In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David. (Vs. 8-17)

So God tells Nathan, "This is what I want you to say to David: 'David, you were nothing but a shepherd when I reached out and I found you. I took you and I made you the ruler over My people, and I have been with you every step of the way. I have given you what you needed to defeat your enemies. I have given you what you needed to do everything I have asked and I will make your name great.'" As a matter of fact, the language is, "I will make you one of the greatest names on the face of the earth!" Think about this: Three thousand years later there are parents who continue to name their sons David in honor of the great king of Israel. David is one of the all-time greats, and God says, "I did this for you and I am also doing great things for My people, Israel. I took them out of the land of Egypt. I brought them to the Land of Promise. I planted them in the land and, David, I will keep them safe and secure and they will have rest. For the first time they will be a nation at rest in their own land."

But it's more than that. The promise is that God will build David a house. Here the term is used metaphorically as a dynasty. "David, when you die, your son will become king." Now stop and think about this. Through the 1 and 2 Samuel story, Eli had sons that did not follow in his way. Samuel had sons that did not follow in his way. Saul had sons that did not follow in his dynasty. David is the first leader who will have sons who will continue a dynasty that God has established. "David, I will raise up your son and he will build the temple. He will build My house." Basically the idea is, "David, your job is to be king and conquer the land; your attention needs to be on conquering the enemies and giving your people rest. You will do that so well that your son will have the freedom as king to turn his attention to building the temple and that will be symbolic of the people now dwelling in the Land of Promise. Your sons will be like My sons and I will be a father to them, and when they step out of line and commit iniquity, I will correct them and I will discipline them, but with My lovingkindness. I will not reject them like I did Saul." David's dynasty will last forever.

So what is he talking about here? It goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15. God made a promise that through the seed of a woman, He would bring forth a Savior who would make it possible for sinful men and women to make it back to paradise. We get to Genesis 12 and we find out that God makes a covenant with Abraham, that it will be a descendant of Abraham. Abraham will establish a nation—the Hebrew people—and through a seed of Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed. By the end of the book of Genesis we find out it will be someone not only from Israel, from Abraham, but specifically from the tribe of Judah. If you know the story, that's quite shocking: Judah is the last one we're expecting this seed to flow through, but that's what we're told. Now we get to 2 Samuel 7 and we find out that among those in the tribe of Judah, the specific family will be the family line of David. What will happen is with each son there will be this wonder: Is it this son? Is this the long-awaited promised Messiah? But each son will sin, disqualifying himself, and God will correct them; God will rebuke them, but God will not reject

them—son after son after son. There will be dark times when it seems like certainly God has forgotten His promise, until finally in the words of Matthew, chapter 1, verse 1: "The genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, *son of David, son of Abraham*." So this is a highly significant chapter that tells us the Messiah will flow through the house of David, establishing David's dynasty through Jesus forever!

Now imagine being told that your kingly dynasty will last forever and the Messiah of Israel will come through your family line. It's quite a staggering moment for David. Even though the text does not use the word *covenant*, other Old Testament references such as Psalm 89 refer to this as God's covenant with David; so we refer to it as the Davidic Covenant. David then responds with this magnificent prayer starting in verse 18:

> **Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who am I, O LORD GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O LORD GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom of man, O LORD GOD. Again what more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, O LORD GOD! For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness to let Your servant know. For this reason You are great, O LORD GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods? For You have established for Yourself Your people Israel as Your own people forever, and You, O LORD, have become their God. Now therefore, O LORD GOD, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house, confirm it forever, and do as You have spoken, that Your name may be magnified forever, by saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel'; and may the house of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made a revelation to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore Your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to You. Now, O LORD GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant. Now therefore, may it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You. For You, O LORD GOD have spoken; and with Your blessing may the house of Your servant be blessed forever."** (Vs. 18-29)

Now this is a magnificent prayer of praise to God, but there are two specific things that David states—things that we need to know in order to live out our Christian faith with humility and confidence. Without getting lost in lots of the detail, in essence this is what David says: First of all he says, "**Who am I, O LORD GOD**, a**nd what is my house that You have brought me this far**?" This is very similar to the words of Saul when Saul is struggling with, "Who am I to be king? The smallest tribe, smallest family—I'm a nobody." That flowed out of Saul's insecurity and Saul never really came to grips with that. It's what produced his fear. It's what produced his doubt. It's then what produced his arrogance and his pride as he tried to prove to everyone that he was really great. But in this moment David reflects rightly that he in no way deserves this. He was just a shepherd boy following the sheep. God shows up and makes him the great king of Israel.

The great truth that David understood is what he says next: "**And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes**." In other words what David was saying is, "God, I was a nobody. I was a shepherd; I

was watching the sheep—but this detail is insignificant. It's irrelevant; it's inconsequential because the story line is not: what can David do for God? The story line is: what can God do for David? The text ...**and this is the custom of man** reads awkwardly in the New American Standard. That Hebrew word translated *custom* is the Hebrew word, Torah. *Custom* is an unfortunate translation in my opinion; it is best translated *revelation*—a way it's often translated in the Old Testament. In other words, this has been the revelation of God all along. God has delighted in taking common, ordinary people and doing extraordinary things through them. That has always been God's way. So David is saying, "I was a nobody. I know that. Now I get it. The story is not about what I can do for God. The story is about what God has done for me! And so who I am is insignificant; it's irrelevant. What's relevant is who God is!" So he launches into this prayer that God is God, that God is awesome, that God is the one true God. God is magnificent and God is choosing to display His grace and His mercy and His power and His magnificence by making David a great king and Israel a great nation.

The other thing that David says then is so very important. He hints at it several times but then he just says it in verse 28: **"Now O LORD GOD, You are God and Your words are truth and You have promised."** What David is saying is, "God, this is just overwhelming. It's almost unimaginable, but I understand this is what *You said* and this is what *You promised*, and I will have the courage to believe *You tell the truth*!" What David in essence says is, "God, I choose to believe You—that this is what You will do for me." David will believe it; David will live it—and David's dynasty will endure forever.

How much exactly David understood about how this would ultimately be fulfilled is hard to know. Could he have possibly understood that one day one of his descendants in the line of David—Jesus the Messiah, Son of David, God in the flesh—would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David? Could he have understood that this would be God in the flesh, come to fulfill the promise—the seed of a woman to bring salvation to a dark and sinful world?

The message of Jesus would be consistent. Jesus entered into a world filled with religion—religion that was suffocating the people—and Jesus stepped into it and made it very clear, "This isn't going to be religion, people. This isn't about what you can do for Me. This is going to be about what I do for you." Jesus said, "*I did not come to be served. I came to serve and to seek and to save the lost, and to give My life as a ransom for many. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should have eternal life."*

The message was consistent: Whether you are a sinner, whether you are a prostitute, whether you are a tax collector, the message is not, "What can you do for Me? That's religion." The message is, "This is what I will do for you." Jesus ultimately went to a cross and shed His blood for forgiveness of sin in order to atone for the sins of you and me, and then He offers that salvation freely as a gift to those who are willing to say, "I believe by faith Jesus did that for me." God forgives our sins and makes us right in the presence of a holy God. But this is so much more than a mere ticket to heaven. If all you see it as is a ticket to heaven, you're going to get lost in the mindset of "What can I do for God? It's really nice that God did this for me and now I owe Him big time. What can I do for God?"

That is the essence of religion, and it is suffocating. Humility is not thinking low thoughts of yourself, shuffling around, kicking a pebble and saying, "I'm really nothing, no good. I have a ticket to heaven and that's really more than I deserve. Woe is me." People, that is not humility! That is disbelief and it is offensive to God. What you're saying is, "God, I don't believe You tell the truth." The reality is: what God has done for you is absolutely magnificent! We get stuck because we keep

looking at ourselves in the mirror and we see our shame; we see our guilt; we see our past; we see our struggles, and we see our failures and we think, "There's no way God could use a loser like me." But the problem is you're looking in the wrong mirror. The mirror of this world no longer applies. I understand we were sinners, misfits, and losers with no hope, but that detail is insignificant to God, because the storyline is not what you can do for God; it's what God has done for you! And on the basis of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, He has made you absolutely magnificent! You stand before a holy God in Christ. You stand righteous...you stand justified...you stand completed...you stand holy...you stand in a way that God loves you and delights in you and celebrates over you! God has made you a trophy of His grace. You were lost with no hope and what God did for you is to make you His masterpiece of grace—so magnificent that when God holds you up before the angels in the heavenlies, the angels will gasp at the wonder of what you've become, and God will say, "This is what I did," *to the praise of the glory of His Grace*. The story has never been about what you can do for God. The story has always been about what God has done for you.

True humility is not thinking low thoughts of yourself. It's not looking at yourself in the mirror at all. Regardless of your past, regardless of your story, regardless of what's been done to you, regardless of the ways that you mess up—stop listening to the voices of the culture and look in a new mirror, a mirror that reflects who you now are in Christ. Humility is realizing who I am is irrelevant. It's what God has done for me and this is who I am in Christ which then becomes the basis of our confidence—that because I stand in the righteousness of Christ, I have the confidence that if God is for me, who can be against me? And because of what God has done for me, I stand magnificent in the presence of God! At the end of the story there's only one opinion that matters, and that person celebrates me more than anyone else celebrates me on planet earth. And it's not because of anything I have done; it's because of what He has done for me!

The second part, like David, is to just believe this! I am convinced the only thing God asks in return is not for you to go out and do a bunch of religion. All He asks in return is: would you be willing to believe I tell the truth? Even though it seems so magnificent, it seems so overwhelming, it seems so unimaginable—the fact is: God said it, and God has a very good track record of telling the truth. Would you have the courage to believe God tells the truth, and even though this seems so unimaginable, say,"With great courage I choose to believe it, and to believe it to such a degree I actually live like it?" That's all God is actually asking from you in return. *To the praise of the glory of His grace, to God be the glory—great things He has done!*

Our Father, we celebrate this morning this absolutely magnificent truth. God, our struggles with low thoughts of self and struggles with low self esteem are because we are looking in the wrong mirror. God, help us to see that this is not about what we can do for You, but what You have done for us. God, give us the courage and the faith to believe, to believe so much that we actually live like it—to the praise of the glory of Your grace. Amen.

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The Leader's Prayer

Courage to Lead

2 Samuel 7:1-29

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Opening Discussion

1. Does arrogance flow out of insecurity or confidence? Why?

2. Define humility? What's the difference between humility and insecurity?

3. What does arrogance reveal in a spiritual leader?

Bible Study

1. Read II Samuel 7:1-3. Compare Haggai 1:1-11. Compare David's perspective to the people in Haggai's time. What might be a modern day comparison to David's heart and the people in Haggai's time?

2. Read II Samuel 7:4-17. God is not rebuking David so much as He's wanting to correct David's perspective. Is the issue really about what David can do for God or what God can do for David? How does this help us with our own perspective in terms of what God is asking of us?

3. What is God promising David in this text (covenant Ps 89:1-4)?

4. The promise goes from Genesis 3:15 to Genesis 12:1-3 to Genesis 49:10 to II Samuel 7 to Matthew 1:1, Luke 1:26-33. How is Jesus the fulfillment to these promises?

5. Read II Samuel 7:18-29. How does David respond to the LORD? Where does David's humility come from and where does his confidence come from (specifically from what he says in his prayer)?

6. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. As new covenant believers, how should these same two attributes define us (humility and confidence)?

7. Read Romans 8: 31-39. What should define us as spiritual leaders today? Why?

Application

1. Is the big issue what you can do for God or what God has done for you? Why does having a right perspective matter? How does this change how you view yourself and your calling?

2. Rewrite a summary of the "leader's prayer" in your own words (7:18-29). How can you use this prayer to help you keep a right perspective as a leader?

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