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The Victorious Leader

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 8:1-18

Pastor Bryan Clark

In 2009 Tim Keller published an excellent book called *Counterfeit Gods*. In the book he talks about different idols and gods in our culture. In one particular chapter he talks about political idolatry. He says, *"One of the signs that an object is functioning as an idol is that fear becomes one of the chief characteristics of life. When we center our lives on the idol, we become dependent on it. If our counterfeit god is threatened in any way, our response is complete panic. We do not say, 'What a shame or how difficult', but rather, 'This is the end! There is no hope!' This may be a reason why so many people now respond to US political trends in such an extreme way. When either party wins an election, a certain percentage of the losing side talks openly about leaving the country. They become agitated and fearful for the future. They have put the kind of hope in their political leaders and policies that once was reserved for God and the work of the gospel. When their political leaders are out of power, they experience a death. They believe that if their policies and people are not in power, everything will fall apart." He goes on to say, "The increasing political polarization and bitterness we see in US politics today is a sign that we have made political activism into a form of religion." **

I think Tim Keller is dead-on with what he says and I do believe there are many evangelical Christians that need to repent from their political idolatry. Whether that's you or not, I'll leave that between you and God, but I would like to make a suggestion: Let's be done with the fear. Let's be done with the anger. Let's be done with the hurtful rhetoric. Let's be done with that and focus our attention on the hope of the gospel. Let's stop being part of the problem and let's start being part of the solution. That's what I'd like to talk about today.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 8. If you're new with us, we've been working our way through 2 Samuel. We find ourselves in chapter 8 this morning. These middle chapters in 2 Samuel are not the typical Hebrew narrative style that's typically a story that is driven by a plot. They're more thematic. They're rather unusual in a Hebrew narrative. The purpose in a narrative is to cause the reader to stop, just kind of reflect, think about what's transpired, and then soon enough we'll be back to the more plot-driven chapters. Many refer to this chapter as a catalog of victories—talking about something that was relatively common in the ancient Near-East—to just create a catalog of the great victories of a king. And what David has accomplished is actually quite remarkable. So chapter 8, verse 1:

> **Now after this it came about that David defeated the Philistines and subdued them; and David took control of the chief city from the hand of the Philistines.** (*NASB, 2 Samuel 8:1)

The opening line, **Now after this...** could be translated *over the course of time*. It's probably a better translation. It's just simply saying that over the course of time, this is what David accomplished as king. The first it identifies is his defeat and subduing of the Philistines. Around 1200 BC "ish", Egypt was declining as a regional power. The Philistines were really believed to be the next great power. The Philistines were the nation that caused all the pain and suffering during Saul's reign. We're actually told in the text that the Philistines were at war with Saul all through the duration of his time as king. They were the reason that Israel asked for a human king. They wanted

a human king to go out and fight their battles, and specifically against the Philistines. So it's a remarkable thing to go from: the Philistines defeated Israel, killed Saul and his sons and dismembered them, to now, under King David, David has completely defeated the Philistines. He's pushed them back deep into their own territory. He's actually taken over the city of Gath and the Sea of Gath now is part of David's empire as king. So if you can imagine in your mind a map of Israel—or in the back of your Bible I'm sure there's a map—from the foothills west of the Jordan River all the way to the Mediterranean, that's referred to as the coastal plain, that was dominated by the Philistines. That has now all been recaptured by David and the Philistines are subject to David as king. Verse 2:

> **He defeated Moab, and measured them with the line, making them lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death and one full line to keep alive. And the Moabites became servants to David, bringing tribute.**

Now there are a couple of questions here. One is: what is the nature of the conflict with Moab? You remember the Moabites are actually relatives of David. His great-grandmother was Ruth; she was a Moabitess. When Saul was after David, David took his parents to Moab to seek refuge there. There's a Jewish tradition that the Moabites killed David's parents. Whether that's true or not is impossible to really determine. Another line of thought is that the Moabites were going together with the Ammonites and the Edomites to kind of create a force to wipe out David because he's becoming too powerful. What all is going on we don't know; we just know there was this battle and David prevailed. The other part is the description of these **lines**, and what all that means. The end of the discussion is nobody knows. Nobody knows what that's referring to. What we do know is that David killed two-thirds and spared one-third.

It's really important that we don't project 21st century sensibilities back into an ancient culture that we really don't understand very well. In the ancient world it was bloody; it was violent; it was kill or be killed. You had multiple nations in a very small region and they were constantly at war with one another. When one nation defeated another nation, what do you do with those people? Either you put them to death or you turn them into slaves. It would be easy, sitting in our comfortable chairs to say, "Well, you should have just let them go," but if you let them go, they go back; they regroup; they come back and kill your family. That just wasn't a reasonable option. And so if a nation conquered another nation, sometimes they simply didn't have the resources to take care of massive amounts of slaves, so many of the people were put to death; some were kept as slaves. So whether we understand that or not in a modern culture, it was commonly practiced in an ancient culture. The point of that verse is: at the end of the verse when it tells us the Moabites *became servants and brought tribute*, that would be the text's way of saying they were now submissive to David as king. They were now part of David's growing empire. Verse 3:

> **Then David defeated Hadadezer,** (which from this point on, will be referred to as "King Had", for the convenience of the preacher – (*laughter*) then when David defeated Had**, the son of Rehob king of Zobah, as he went to restore his rule at the River. David captured from him 1,700 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers; and David hamstrung the chariot horses, but reserved *enough* of them for 100 chariots. When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, king of Zobah, David killed 22,000 Arameans. Then David put garrisons among the Arameans of Damascus, and the Arameans became servants to David, bringing tribute. And the LORD helped David wherever he went. David took the shields of gold which were carried by the servants**

of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. From Betah and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, King David took a very large amount of bronze. (Vs. 3-8)

So now, geographically, we move directly north, so this would go all the way to the Euphrates River, kind of a massive amount of territory to the north. *King Had* had it. The Arameans came from Damascus to help. David conquers all of that. Again, the idea that they are bringing tribute is that they are now subjects; they are surrendered to David as their king. There are all the spoils of victory, but the main point of focus is in verse 6: **And the LORD helped David wherever he went.** There is a reminder that it is not David's skill; it is David's faith. David, now surrendered to God as king, is experiencing unimaginable victories, one after another. Verse 9:

Now when Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the army of Hadadezer, Toi sent Joram his son to King David to greet him and bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him; for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi. And Joram brought with him articles of silver, of gold and of bronze. King David also dedicated these to the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated from all the nations which he had subdued: from Aram and Moab and the sons of Ammon and the Philistines and Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah. (Vs. 9-12)

So Toi is at war with *Had*. He figures out that David has conquered *Had*. He doesn't want to fight David, so willingly surrenders, willingly acknowledges David as king by sending this tribute. So David is amassing a tremendous amount of wealth as the spoils of war. So one question would be, "What does David do with this?" If you remember, one of Saul's problems was Saul was selfish and greedy. This was one of the moments that got Saul in deep trouble. He kept stuff for himself that God said he wasn't allowed to keep. David now has amassed tremendous wealth, and the text tells us he consistently submitted it to God in an act of worship, which is just to tell us the frame of mind, the spirit, the heart of David through all of this. Verse 13:

So David made a name for *himself* when he returned from killing 18,000 Arameans in the Valley of Salt. He put garrisons in Edom. In all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became servants to David. And the LORD helped David wherever he went. (Vs. 13-14)

Again the repetition of that significant phrase: *It is God giving victory to David* because of David's faith in God as king. What has transpired is absolutely remarkable. If you think of this on a map, what you are talking about is from the foothills all the way west to the Mediterranean Sea—the coastal plains David has conquered—south is Edom which David has conquered; to the southeast, directly across from the Dead Sea are the Edomites; right above them, the Ammonites, right above them, the Arameans, and the Amalekites are like terrorists that showed up in various places. David has literally conquered every nation North, South, East, and West. This is the closest that the nation of Israel will ever come to possessing all of the land God promised Abraham. What has happened under David is absolutely remarkable! To put it in geopolitical terms: he started as a tribal king; he moved to a king of a nation; he moved to a king of multiple nations, and he has ultimately built an empire. He literally controls this entire geographical territory, what was previously thought impossible. So the question arises: What will David do with his new-found power and wealth? Verse 15:

So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people. Joab the son of Zeruiah *was* over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud *was* recorder. Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar *were* priests, and Seraiah *was* secretary. Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers. (Vs 15-18)

So David moves from kind of a tribal organization to now running an empire. The last paragraph is just kind of the players in his empire, but the real significant statement that I want to drill down on is when it says, **David reigned over all Israel**, which would be a reference to all those under his reign, including all the conquered nations**...and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people**. If you've been around here for a while, you realize those two terms are not just any two descriptors. Those are two technical terms that describe what the Bible refers to as *shalom*. Shalom is far more than kind of an absence of conflict; it is a place of mutual flourishing. It is the world as God intended it to be. The word justice is the Hebrew word *mishpat*, and it means *true justice*. Regardless of your race, regardless of your gender, regardless of your socio-economic status, it's *true justice*—and that is determined by a standard of righteousness. This is a form of the word *tzadik*. *Tzadik* is a righteous person; a form of this word which means righteousness or righteous behavior. God is King; it's God's righteousness; He defines the standard, and it's true justice in the land, with the desire that all peoples would flourish together, something that the nation of Israel has never experienced in the land. This would be the high point of flourishing. In many ways they would never experience this again; so this is a significant time in their history. What God has done is remarkable!

Now you might say, "I don't know; it didn't seem like a lot of flourishing for the Edomites and the Moabites and the Arameans and the Philistines." Let's talk about that. These were many nations in a very small geographic area. It was constant fighting and warfare. These were pagan nations that were about bloodshed and warfare. They lived in constant fear of violence from without. They also lived in constant fear of violence from within. There was virtually no way for these people to flourish. So think of it this way: Imagine a classroom full of elementary children—no teacher, all day. What is the chance that all those students are going to flourish? I would say it's zero. Eventually the pecking order takes over, and there would be many of those students that would feel unsafe and feel like they are not able to flourish. Then a skillful teacher steps in the classroom. This is the teacher given the authority to bring order out of chaos, and to cultivate an environment where every student could feel safe and flourish in that classroom. It was virtually impossible without that teacher's presence.

What David did in conquering the region was to use his newfound power and position to bring true justice and righteousness to the land for all peoples. As long as people were willing to play by the rules and pursue shalom, they had a legitimate chance to flourish in a way they had never known before. For those who were determined to do violence to shalom, they received justice; they were rightly punished. The only way shalom can work is if there is a true sense of justice in the land. What was accomplished was amazing and there's so much we can learn from this. About fifty to sixty years previous to this moment, the nation of Israel wanted the longings of their heart realized. It's the longing that is in every human heart, and that is for safety, for security, and for belonging. They just wanted a place where they could flourish and feel safe and raise a family and love one another. But they believed that the pathway to that was to reject God as king and chose instead a human king. So that was the choice they made. For forty years under King Saul, life was miserable. There was no flourishing; they were constantly at war, constantly fearing for their lives, with no justice in the land. Life was miserable!

Apart from the sovereign intervention of God, Israel would have been eradicated as a people. But God was up to something. For twenty years God was raising up a leader in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*, a man after His own heart, who would call the people back to God as King. There's this interesting dynamic where even though God is sovereign, God doesn't just insert Himself into the nation and take over. They made their choices and there were consequences with those choices. But now there was a new leader, and leadership matters. This leader had a heart for God, had a heart to call people back to God as King. It would be God as King; it would be God's righteousness; it would be God's justice and, ultimately, it would be God who would be worshipped. God did amazing things through David!

Somewhere in the 60's, most culture watchers say something fundamentally changed in our nation. Deep within the human heart is this longing for peace and safety and security and a world where we can all flourish together. But for that to happen, we thought we needed to be our own king. We want to reject God as king; we want to be our own king; we want to be our own god. We think that's the pathway that will deliver heaven on earth. With that comes pluralism—the idea that all roads lead to God because *we're* now in charge and that's what *we* say—and relativism, the idea where there is no absolute standard. We're all free to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong which, by the way, as long as relativism prevails, there is virtually no chance for justice in a community. None! Until we can together agree there is a standard that defines right and wrong, there is no potential for justice. But we concluded: this is the path of flourishing. In the 60's, it was a theory. We are now fifty years down the path. It's not a theory anymore. It's a reality. So let me ask you, "Is there any thinking person among us that would say it has produced heaven on earth?" Any thinking person would say, "Something seems really wrong; it feels like things are unraveling."

The secular worldview believes that people are ultimately good, inherently good. It's just their environment that makes them bad. So if you just turn them loose, allow everyone the freedom to decide for themselves, it's going to produce heaven on earth—freedom and everything that we desire. The biblical worldview is that people are inherently sinful as of the fall from Genesis 3. People are in bondage to a sinful nature. We are in bondage to sin. We are selfish and greedy and self-centered by nature. Therefore, if necessary, we will disadvantage others to advantage ourselves. This is why the Bible's position would be: even a bad government is better than no government, because with no teacher in the classroom, we will destroy ourselves...because we are inherently sinful. What has transpired is the culture has not gotten better and better. We don't have more freedoms; it's just the opposite. It becomes the law of the jungle. So when everyone makes up their own rules, behavior becomes more and more hurtful. So then those in authority pass more and more laws to control that. In our culture, both sides use shame and guilt and name-calling to somehow correct behavior they believe to be inappropriate. It's external pressure to try to change behavior. But as it gets more oppressive, people become more rebellious, which creates more bad behavior, which necessitates more laws, more oppression, more conflict, and it becomes this destructive cycle. Eventually one side crushes the other and no one flourishes. Just read your history books.

If you think of the cycle of legalism in the life of the individual, it is exactly the same in a community or a nation. All these attempts of external pressures to somehow bring about change in human behavior ultimately just adds fuel to the fire and it cycles worse and worse. This is why there is no political party that has the power to bring about true lasting change—because the change that is necessary is not external pressure. What has to change is deep within the human condition. Something deep within the human heart must change for anything of significance to change. There is no political party that can make that happen.

David was a great king but David was not a perfect king. David would mess up, and we'll get to that soon enough in our study. But chapter seven reminded us that there would come a descendant of David, a Son of David, who would finally be the perfect King. David is a shadow, a type of the One to come. Matthew opens up his Gospel: "Jesus, the Messiah, son of Abraham, son of David, the long-awaited King had come, born in Bethlehem that first Christmas night, in the very city of David." The angels would say he had come to bring peace on earth. The Greek word is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*. Jesus, the Messiah, would bring the way for people to experience true flourishing as God intended.

Jesus did not come to start a new religion. He did not come, bringing laws to suppress and oppress people. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus came to set the captives free. Jesus came to call the religious hypocrites, the sinners, the misfits, the losers, to experience life that would be made possible through his death, burial and resurrection. His substitutionary death on the cross would be payment for sin, and salvation would be offered freely to anyone who chooses to receive it. No matter your race, no matter your socio-economic status, no matter your gender, no matter if you're a good person or the worst person on the planet, it is equally offered to anyone who chooses to receive it.

The salvation that Jesus offers is not a make-over; it is a radical transformation. It is a new birth; it is becoming a new creation in Christ. It is the eradication of the sinful nature set free from the bondage of sin, replaced with the very nature of Christ Himself. Empowered by the Spirit of God, where deep in the human soul there is a genuine, authentic longing for shalom, the heartbeat is not for selfishness and greed, but it's truly to experience life as God intended it to be. There's been a genuine, authentic transformation deep within the human heart.

Jesus then assigns His followers, known as the church, the responsibility of being the caretakers of this life-changing message—to be the stewards of the gospel. Jesus couldn't have been clearer: It's not government; it's not politics; it's not a political party that can bring about the change that our souls long for. It is the life-changing message of the gospel, and Jesus made us, as the church, the caretakers, the stewards of the message. Jesus promised, "One day I'm coming back and I will establish my kingdom and it will be everything that your soul longs for today—true, lasting shalom." But until that day, the assignment is to at least work for that now and at least create pockets of shalom that at least give people a glimpse of the world as God intended it to be. That creates a platform from which I can present the life-changing message of Jesus.

So here's the assignment:

First of all, I think it's very helpful sometimes to put a stake in the ground. I would suggest this morning we put this stake in the ground: "I'm done with the anger; I'm done with the fear; I'm done with the hurtful rhetoric. The enemy has found a way to distract the church toward things that ultimately cannot bring about change, and we're distracted from that which ultimately brings hope. There is no hope for this culture unless the church does her job. We have a mission!

Second of all, if you cannot control yourself on social media, please—I'm pleading with you—get off social media. When Christians on social media go off with hurtful rhetoric, it makes it really hard for me to share the gospel with my unbelieving friends because we all get lumped in that together. So for the sake of the people in this room who are serious about reaching their unsaved friends and relatives, if you cannot control yourself on social media, please get off for the sake of the gospel! (applause)

Then here's the assignment:

Think about the environments into which God has called you—your family, your neighborhood, your school, your team, your dorm, your workplace, the marketplace, your community—wherever it is that God has called you. What would it mean for you to be faithful to the mission and to move into those environments and to skillfully navigate away from the political anger and bring at least a glimpse of shalom, a glimpse of hope that creates a platform from which you can share the life-changing message of Jesus? These are difficult times in our nation. But these days are an opportunity for us to be caretakers and stewards of the message of the gospel and bring people true life-changing hope.

This is Christmas. This is everything that Christmas is about. This is why God sent His Son. So when you see the lights, when you see the trees, when you hear the Christmas carols, let it be a reminder to stop so much energy and emotion toward political stuff and to focus our attention on the mission that we have been given. What would it mean for me to bring about some level of shalom in the environments in which God has called me? Every light, every tree, every carol can be a reminder: that's what Christmas is about. I've got to be true to the assignment. It seems to me that if we would be diligent in these difficult days to be the church, that is the most wonderful Christmas present we could bring the people in our lives.

Our Father, we celebrate that when it seemed like there was no hope, You sent Your Son to be the Savior of the world. God, help us to understand the seriousness of the responsibility that we have been given to be caretakers of the message of the gospel. God, forgive us of our political idolatry and, God, refocus us as Your church, on the mission to carry the gospel into the darkness and at least create pockets of shalom, that create platforms presenting the message that has so dramatically changed our lives. Lord, that's our prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

*Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (Dutton, Penguin Group, 2009), p. 99

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Courage to Lead

2 Samuel 8:1-18

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Opening Discussion

1. What do you think people ultimately want out of life? What do they want for their families, friendships, communities, etc?

2. The default mode for most people is that to experience what they want out of life they need to function as their own god. Can this path ever lead to what they are truly looking for? Why or why not?

3. Think about every context where you do life (work, home, school, family, etc…). What would it mean for you to be the leader in that environment who brings a glimpse of the world as God intended it to be (shalom)?

Bible Study

1. Review the main message of II Samuel 7. David is a type or picture of Jesus as the long awaited promised Messiah and King. Keep that in mind as we go through chapter 8.

2. This section of II Samuel is not driven by a plot like most of I and II Samuel are. These are big themes that represent the crescendo of David's leadership as King. Read II Samuel 8:1-18. Using the maps in the back of your Bible or a Google map see if you can locate the various nations or areas David conquers. Notice it covers the North, South, East and West.

3. This is basically the same "Israel" as under Saul. Notice the difference one leader can make on a nation. What was it about David that made the difference? (see v.6, 11, 14). Review what was necessary to make David the leader God wanted him to be?

4. By defeating Israel's enemies David was able to create a nation defined by "justice" and "righteousness." Define these two terms. Why are they absolutely necessary for there to be mutual flourishing (shalom)?

5. Can a community or nation thrive apart from God? Why or why not?
6. Can there be justice and righteousness without an absolute standard? Why or why not?

7. How is David a picture or type of Christ in this text? What enemies has Jesus defeated to bring us "rest" in the land?

8. What would it mean for you to bring "shalom" into the contexts that define your life? How can you practically bring flourishing into those environments?

Application

1. All it takes is one leader who is willing to trust God to bring significant change to an environment. What is necessary for you to be that person? How much courage will it take?

2. What might you need to stop doing or change to be that leader?

3. What cost are you willing to pay to give hurting and confused people a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and introduce them to the ultimate King who can set them free from their enemies?

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