April 8/9, 2017

Leaders and the Abuse of Power

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 20:1-26

Pastor Bryan Clark

As we've said several times throughout this series, leadership is influence. And influence is authority. And, sadly, there's never a shortage of people willing to abuse that authority to pursue their own personal agenda. Probably almost everybody in the room today could share stories of ways you've been deeply wounded by those in authority—whether that's been at home, at school, at a church, in the marketplace. But I want to turn the question a little bit this morning. Rather than looking at whether or not you have been wounded, the question I want us to wrestle with this morning is, "Are you absolutely sure you're not doing the same thing to someone else?" That's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 20. Chapter 20 is considered to be the final chapter of what scholars refer to as the rebellion section of 2 Samuel—starting in chapter 11, closing with chapter 20. When we left the story last week, the nation is gathering at Gilgal for about a twenty-mile escort or parade back to Jerusalem to put David back on the throne as king. But because of roughly a decade of passive leadership, there's a lot of conflict within the nation. There is clearly conflict between the North which is Israel and Judah which is the South. So we left them with quite a bit of conflict over who is going to get the most prominent role in the parade back to Jerusalem. We pick it up there: Chapter 20, verse1:

> **Now a worthless fellow happened to be there whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite; and he blew the trumpet and said,**
>
> **"We have no portion in David,**
> **Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse;**
> **Every man to his tents, O Israel!"**
>
> **So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David *and* followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem.** (*NASB, 2 Samuel 20:1-2)

A couple of things right at the beginning of this chapter. When it describes **...a worthless fellow happened to be there...** of course *there* is Gilgal where the nation is gathering for this parade back to Jerusalem, but in English the words **...happened to be there...**seem pretty straight forward, but the Hebrew is a very odd construction. As a matter of fact, there is only one other time in the entire Old Testament where this construction appears and it's in Chapter 18—specifically referring to when Absalom *happened to be there* in a forest to encounter David's men. So scholars believe that there is no question that the writer wants to connect the rebellion of Sheba with the rebellion of Absalom. Absalom was the main rebellion; this is kind of an echo, and carries the idea that whenever there is conflict, there are always those willing to step in, and stir up more conflict for their own personal benefit, and that's Sheba who is described as *a worthless fellow*. He's described also as **the son of Bichri, a Benjamite**. So we know he's of the tribe of Saul, but one thing to notice throughout this story, he is always identified as *Sheba, the son of Bichri.* It's a rather odd repetition which causes us to ask the question, "Why?" The word Bichri, while it's his father's name, it's also the Hebrew word for *camel*—in the Hebrew world symbolic of someone who is rebellious and stubborn and kind of cantankerous. So it's probably a reflection not only of his family name, but of his personality. He's just always looking to stir up trouble. So he *blows his*

trumpet, which is worth noting because this story starts with a trumpet and it will end with a trumpet—kind of the book ends of the story. Basically he says, "**We have no portion in David**." That is a phrase that will be repeated again and again in the decades to follow as the split between the North and the South becomes greater and greater with subsequent kings. The text is basically saying that the North which is the 10 or 11 tribes of the North, referred to as Israel, decide that they are going to take their toys and go home. They don't have a prominent enough place in the parade so, "We are not going to participate at all," and Sheba convinces them to basically go back home to their tents. Verse 3:

> **Then David came to his house at Jerusalem, and the king took the ten women, the concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and placed them under guard and provided them with sustenance, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as widows.** (Vs. 3)

Verse three is just an odd verse. Really the first thing David does when he gets back to Jerusalem is that? That's what the text tells us, but when you understand the primary purpose of chapter 20 is just to show little snippets of abuse of power, then it begins to make more sense. We've talked about this several times, that it was customary for a king in the ancient Near East to build a harem, wives and concubines. David did this, but it was not pleasing to God. Virtually every time this happens in the Old Testament, it always leads to disaster. So here you have ten concubines. These are young women who had a chance to have a husband, have children, have a life, but they will never get the chance to realize their dream now because David took them as concubines and wives. When it was time to exile Jerusalem, for reasons that are unclear, he leaves them behind. Absalom then has his way with them on the roof, in public, in order to make a statement that he was defiling his father. So now David is back, and he basically is going to give them food and shelter, but other than that closes them away for the duration of their lives until they die. These are innocent women who had no choice, but their lives will be devastated by David and his abuse of power. That is the essence of that verse. It also reminds us that when Absalom "took" them, and David "took" them, it causes us to go back to Samuel. When the nation wanted a human king, do you remember what Samuel said to the people? "If you insist on a human king, know this, the king will take your sons and your daughters." But they insisted. So now we are reminded that David "took" wives and concubines. The language was very specific. David "took" Bathsheba, and David "took" Uriah." Amnon "took" Tamar; Absalom "took Amnon"; Absalom tried to "take" the kingdom. Joab "took" Absalom, and now we're back and David "took" the concubines and he put them away for the duration of their lives. Verse 4:

> **Then the king said to Amasa, "Call out the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself." So Amasa went to call out *the men of* Judah, but he delayed longer than the set time which he had appointed him. And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, so that he does not find for himself fortified cities and escape from our sight." So Joab's men went out after him, along with the Cherethites and the Pelethites and all the mighty men; and they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was dressed in his military attire, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened at his waist; and as he went forward, it fell out.** (Vs. 4-8)

So let's just pick it up right there. Basically David has a sense of urgency, much like the counsel of Ahithophel to Absalom. "You need to act quickly. If Sheba has time, he will rally an army; they'll get into the fortified cities and we will really have a problem on our hands," basically greater than Absalom, in the sense that Absalom just wanted to take David out and become king. But Sheba basically wants to wipe out the South, wants to wipe out Judah, in order that Israel will dominate. So that's the concern. Now I know that names get confusing. Joab and Abishai are brothers. Amasa is a cousin; they're all nephews to David. David reached out to Amasa in an effort to put the kingdom back together and also to punish Joab for killing Absalom. So he demoted Joab and he put Amasa in charge of the troops, and this is Amasa's first assignment. "You've got three days to go about Judah, muster the troops, and show up right back here." Three days have passed with no sign of Amasa. David doesn't know if he's just incompetent or has he joined the rebellion? But David needs to act so he calls up Abishai. It's interesting that Joab isn't the second one in charge; he's somewhere down the line. But Abishai is rallied, "Take the elite troops; go out there and deal with Sheba before he causes more trouble." It's interesting in verse 7 that the troops are referred to as **Joab's men**. You can demote Joab all day long, but the bottom line is the troops belong to Joab, and everyone knows it. The text reflects that they are Joab's men, and they head out to Gibeon.

I'm sure you remember what happened in Gibeon, but in case you don't I'll remind you. It goes back to chapter 2 when David was king over Judah and Ishposheth was king over Israel in the North and they were engaged in a civil war. So with Joab in charge of the South, they come together with Abner in charge of the North, and they choose twelve champions per side. They meet at the rock—the stone in Gibeon—and it's twelve against twelve, and winner takes all. They grab one another by the back of the head; they stab their swords through each other. All twenty four die and it breaks into utter chaos, which leads to Abner killing Abishai's and Joab's brother, which then leads to Joab avenging that by killing Abner in cold blood. So this is a significant place in the geography where there's a lot of civil war history. It happens to be the place, then, where they bump into Amasa. Whatever Amasa was doing, they run into him there, and we are told that Joab is dressed in his **military attire** and he has with him a **sword**. The Hebrew word isn't actually *sword*; it's a *dagger*, basically describing a short dagger that would have been strapped on the inside of his left thigh. It was kind of a hidden weapon so that in close combat it could be accessed and used when necessary. Now Joab is a professional soldier; he is an elite soldier. There is no way that Joab just kind of bumbles along and drops his dagger. So there's a clear sense in that he's up to something here.

> **And Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa was not on guard against the sword which was in Joab's hand so he struck him in the belly with it and poured out his inward parts on the ground, and did not *strike* him again, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. Now there stood by him one of Joab's young men, and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, *let him* follow Joab." But Amasa lay wallowing in *his* blood in the middle of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa from the highway into the field and threw a garment over him when he saw that everyone who came by him stood still. As soon as he was removed from the highway, all the men passed on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.** (Vs. 9-13)

So Joab *is* up to something. He pretends to drop his dagger, reaches down, picks it up, and with it in his hand pretends to lean over to give Amasa a kiss and basically stabs him, opens him up and kills him. A couple things to note: The level of graphic detail is very high—literally spilled his guts on the highway. It is the narrator's way of disapproving of this cold-blooded murder—the

function of the graphic details. We're also told that he did not need a second chance. You remember when Joab stuck the four darts in Absalom and then the other soldiers came and finished Absalom off, I mentioned he was a professional killer; there was no way he needed four tries. But he was doing that in order that multiple people would be responsible for the killing of Absalom. This text confirms again that is true. This is a professional killer; all he needs is one shot. Joab and Abishai are now so cold and callous and blood thirsty that they have murdered their cousin in cold blood and are willing to simply leave him dead on the road and keep marching on. Even Absalom got a burial of sorts when he was thrown in a ditch and stones piled on top. This is just reflecting they couldn't have cared less about their cousin Amasa. This was Joab's way of taking charge again. So they are on their way and one of Joab's men says, "*If you're for David, if you're for Joab, then follow the leader."* But the soldiers—and this is worth noting—these soldiers are combat veterans, but they are so stunned at the graphic, violent nature of what just happened, they can't move. They've come to the body of Amasa and they're just stuck there. So Joab's servant takes the body, drags it into a field, throws some sort of a cover over it, gets it off the road, and the men are able to march on in pursuit of Sheba. Again there is this theme of gross abuse of power.

> **Now he went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel, even Beth-maacah, and all the Berites; and they were gathered together and also went after him. They came and besieged him in Abel Beth-maacah, and they cast up a siege ramp against the city, and it stood by the rampart; and all the people who were with Joab were wreaking destruction in order to topple the wall. Then a wise woman called from the city, "Hear, hear! Please tell Joab, 'Come here that I may speak with you.'" So he approached her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" And he answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening." Then she spoke, saying, "Formerly they used to say, 'They will surely ask *advice* at Abel,' and thus they ended *the dispute*. I am of those who are peaceable *and* faithful in Israel. You are seeking to destroy a city, even a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?" Joab replied, "Far be it, far be it from me that I should swallow up or destroy! Such is not the case. But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has lifted up his hand against King David. Only hand him over, and I will depart from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head will be thrown to you over the wall." Then the woman wisely came to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they were dispersed from the city, each to his tent. Joab also returned to the king at Jerusalem.** (Vs. 14-22)

So basically Joab and his men travel all over the North through the tribes, finally catch up to Sheba at pretty much the farthest northern part of the kingdom, just about four miles west of the city of Dan. This is a historic city, and this is what the woman is reflecting—that this is a famous historic city that is known for its wisdom and for its ability to accomplish peace in the land. So the woman calls out; she wants to talk to Joab, and what she says to Joab in the Hebrew is beautiful, thoughtful, poetry. It's very impressive. Basically what she says is, "We have a long, revered history in Israel. When people had disputes, they came to our city. We offered wisdom, and the disputes were settled. So why would you now come and destroy a city with such a wonderful reputation in Israel?" Joab tells her, "I really am not here to destroy the city; I'm here to find Sheba. If you have him, turn him over; we'll go home." She agrees. "We'll throw his head over the wall." She talks to the people; the next thing you know the head comes flying over the wall, which satisfies Joab. *He blows the trumpet*. He blows the trumpet at the beginning of the story and at the end of the story, and they go home.

The last little paragraph is just a review of David's cabinet; the one name worth noting is Joab who is once again in charge of the troops. So, again, this is a rather odd chapter. Again, imagine reading this at home in your quiet time. The application to your life is abundantly clear, is it not? *(laughter)* These are the chapters where people say, "I don't get this book," and I completely understand that.

There are a couple things to note. One is you have David's abuse of these women. David has a very bad track record with women in the David story. But what you have throughout 1 and 2 Samuel is God has this value on these heroic, courageous women that show up in the Samuel story. So it starts with Hannah, who is an incredible, courageous, faithful woman that gets the whole story started at the beginning of 1 Samuel. You have Abigail who is a courageous, impressive woman who teaches David one of the most valuable lessons of his life, and stops him from committing a slaughter that seems more like Saul than a man *after God's own heart*. You have the woman of Tekoa that Joab used to speak wisdom, who comes off as a wise woman of integrity that God used and now you have this woman in Abel who basically spares the needless slaughter of men, women, and children in their city with her courage and with her wisdom. So in a context where David is portrayed in a light where he has abused his power, you also have a picture of these courageous, faithful women that appear throughout the story.

The other major hint comes at the end of the story, with this weird part of the story when Sheba's head comes flying over the wall. Now obviously that is quite odd, but think about the emphasis that the text has put for this whole rebellion section on the *head*—the head as a picture of authority and most often as the abuse of authority. It even takes us back to the beginning of the David story—cutting off Goliath's head and Goliath's abuse of power. So now it causes us to think back to that theme of this story. You have Absalom getting his head caught in the tree, his gross abuse of authority and power. You have Sheba now stepping into the conflict and abusing his influence for personal gain. You have David and his abuses in the kingdom such as with the wives and the concubines. You have Joab with his consistent abuse of power, and this is of all the moments, the most cold-blooded, ruthless murder of all. And all of it leaves the people longing for a better king, longing for a better leader—a leader that would not use his authority and power for personal gain. That is the consistent story.

David was a great king but he wasn't a perfect king, and his tragic mistakes cost thousands of people their lives. And there is this longing for one in the line of David who would finally be the king that the people longed for. That king would finally show up roughly a thousand years later. As a matter of fact, on that first Palm Sunday, there's no question what the people were doing, and what the people were saying—they were welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem as their new king. They believed that Jesus would fulfill their agenda and overthrow Rome who consistently abused its power. What they did not understand was that was not the agenda of Jesus. Before He could be the King of kings and Lord of lords, He would be the Savior of the world; He would fulfill God's promise that God Himself would shed His blood in payment for sin. He would be buried, and He would rise the third day and He would provide salvation for sinful people—that we as sinners and misfits and losers could stand right in the presence of God now and forever. But there is a reminder in that message that the message of the gospel isn't just the forgiveness of sin. It is a promise of a world to come—a kingdom to come that will be everything our souls long for, that will be the world as God intended it to be. The hope of the gospel is: we don't settle for this. There is something so much more and so much better yet to come. Revelation says that when Jesus returns it will be written on His thigh, "King of kings". He will usher in the long awaited Kingdom—the New Heaven and the New Earth that will be everything that we long for today.

It's interesting, when we talk about salvation we typically refer to it in past tense terms—"I was saved five years ago." In the New Testament salvation is referred to in all three verb tenses—past tense: "I was saved," present tense: "I am being saved," future tense: "I will ultimately be saved." Of all the tenses, the one that is used by far the most in reflection of the gospel is the future tense. For us it tends to be the past, but in the New Testament it is the future—the essence of the gospel is that there is a better day coming. You heard it when Brad read the text on communion. We are to *do this until He comes*. Communion always has the reminder, "He's coming back." There is a day when it will be everything our souls long for. The choir sang about it. There will come a day when the pains and the wounds and the struggles and the heartaches and the disappointments will be redeemed—and it will be everything our souls have longed for! That is the hope of the gospel. We don't have to settle for this.

But the question arises, "What about now?" Leadership is influence. The question is: what are you doing with that influence? So let me just ask you an honest question. Could you say with integrity that you get up every morning with a clear sense of mission that my assignment today, wherever God gives me influence, is to create pockets of flourishing, to create glimpses of the kingdom to come, to give people just a taste of the world to come, the kingdom as God has promised it...little pockets of flourishing in order to create platforms by which I can share the message of the gospel?

Or is it possible that for the most part your days are filled using your influence to use people to pursue your own personal agenda? Now, at the end of the day, you are the only one that knows the answer to that question, but I would offer a suggestion. If you're not very intentional every day to create pockets of flourishing, glimpses of the kingdom to come, in order to create platforms for the gospel, if you're not doing that very intentionally, there's a pretty good chance that's not what's happening. Nobody, by default, serves. By default we are selfish, and by default the chances are pretty good we're using our influence to use people to pursue our own personal agenda. My prayer is that God would raise up an army of people that would understand out in our homes, out in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in the marketplace, and in our churches—wherever God has given you influence—you understand that my job is to serve the people around me and to create little pockets of flourishing, little glimpses of *shalom*—the world as God intended it to be—in order to create platforms by which we can have meaningful conversations about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of the returning King and the Kingdom to come. That is our assignment in order to change the world.

Our Father, we celebrate that when we were lost in our sin, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. Lord, we also celebrate that the Jesus of the cross, now resurrected at the right hand of the Father, will return as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He will usher in the kingdom that our souls long for—no more pain, no more sorrow, no more disappointment, no more illness. Our disappointments, our hurts, our heartaches will be gone forever. God, until that day, our assignment is to create little pockets of flourishing, glimpses of that world to come, to provide opportunities for meaningful discussions about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. May we be faithful to our call! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. What are some ways you've been wounded by people in authority? How has that affected your life?

2. What influence or authority do you have right now and what would it look like for you to abuse that influence for personal gain?

3. Can you honestly say that what motivates you daily is a desire to create a place of mutual flourishing for those you influence rather than pursuing a selfish agenda?

Bible Study

1. Read II Samuel 20:1-2. How has David's sin now affected the greater Kingdom? Can selfish choices ever lead to true shalom (mutual flourishing)?

2. Read II Samuel 20:3. What was Samuel's warning in I Samuel 8:10-18? How has that played out under David as king? What makes a leader a taker?

3. While women have been used and exploited again and again in I and II Samuel (a fulfillment of Genesis 3:16) by leaders, how has God celebrated various women in I and II Samuel? Who have been some of the women who have been celebrated as heroes?

4. Read II Samuel 20:4-22. How does this theme of an abuse of power play out in this story? Why would David allow Joab to continually abuse his power and even ignore the orders of the king?

5. Chapters 11-20 are referred to as the "rebellion chapters" of II Samuel. Review the abuses of power, and what was the damage to people's lives? What would you say was at the core of these abuses?

Application

1. Clearly we come out of the "rebellion chapters" of II Samuel longing for a better king (leader). How does this point to the coming of Jesus and how does the Gospel change things?

2. There is a significant difference between using your influence to pursue your own agenda and using your influence to create pockets of shalom (mutual flourishing) for the people around you. Honestly, what is really motivating your behavior on a daily basis?

3. What would it mean to truly seek to use your influence to create shalom in your areas of influence?

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