April 22/23, 2017

A Courageous Leader

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 21:1-22

Pastor Bryan Clark

We've entitled our series through 1and 2 Samuel *Courage to Lead,* and we've reminded ourselves again and again that leadership is really hard. We can't ever forget that God took David out through the *Wilderness School of Leadership* for ten long confusing years before David was ready to take the throne. People don't really like that, especially young leaders. They want to go immediately to the throne and skip the wilderness; but typically that doesn't work out so well. We're reminded that you need courage to lead because sometimes leaders have to make very hard decisions. You need to have courage to lead because sometimes you end up cleaning up someone else's mess. You have to have courage to lead because sometimes you are misunderstood, even falsely accused, for simply trying to do the right thing. And you need to have courage to lead because all of us as leaders sometimes fail—and you have to have the courage to get back on your feet and believe again that God can use you to accomplish something significant in the world. But it is also true that when you have the courage and the faith to trust God to go out there and to slay the giant, not only do you slay the giant but you inspire others around you to equally have the courage and faith to step up and to slay their giants—and that is a powerful thing!

All of that is what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 21. Officially the chronological development of the story of David ended in chapter 20. The final chronological chapters of David's life—his final years and death—are found in 1 Kings, Chapters 1 and 2, and we'll look at both of those before we end our series. But chapters, 21, 22, 23 and 24 are considered an appendix at the end of the book of Samuel. This is actually very common in a Hebrew narrative. You get to the end of the story and there are several chapters that are meant to be kind of a review or an overview of the story so it provides snapshots, little glimpses, little reminders of what we should remember about David and the David story. To make sense of it, it's really important to understand that chronologically this isn't moving forward; this is going back into the story and capturing glimpses of things that have already transpired. Like we've done in several of these chapters, I'm just going to go through, try to explain the details, do my best to pronounce the names, and then at the end I'll go back and try to make some sense as to how it applies to us today.

> **Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the LORD. And the LORD said, "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them (now the Gibeonites were not of the sons of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites, and the sons of Israel made a covenant with them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah). Thus David said to the Gibeonites, "What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?" Then the Gibeonites said to him, "We have no *concern* of silver or gold with Saul or his house, nor is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "I will do for you whatever you say." So they said to the king, "The man who consumed us and who planned to exterminate us from remaining within any border of Israel, let seven men from his sons be given to us, and we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give *them*."** (*NASB, II Sam. 21:1-6)

Now, first of all it's really important to understand there are dramatic differences between ancient Israel and modern-day Christianity, between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant and how basically that all worked out. Israel was an ethnic people; they actually had a physical piece of land that was the Promised Land. Often God's blessings came in health; it came in prosperity with crops, rain, things like that, and judgments had to do with pestilence and disease, ill health, drought, famine, those kinds of things. So to make some sense between the old and present day times can often be extremely difficult and oftentimes, if we don't know that, we really make some serious theological errors. I want to give you just one example of that.

Currently one of the hotbed topics in our nation is the discussion around immigration, illegal immigration, refugees, all of that discussion. Wherever you land on that issue it's important to understand this is a very complicated issue. It's not a couple of sound bytes and, "I'm right and you're wrong," and that settles it, which is so often how this is portrayed in the media. I would suggest to you there are very thoughtful, loving, caring people on all sides of this issue. If we would spend more time listening and less time spouting our opinions, we probably would make more progress.

One of the things that concerns me is when Christians don't understand the difference between Old Testament Israel and modern-day America. They start yanking verses out of context from the Old Testament and attaching it to their political position and ultimately saying, "There, God is on our side." You see this all the time. I saw a document not too long ago that was proposing a certain position. It had eight or ten verses listed using the word "stranger". The translation of the Hebrew word for stranger would have kind of been a refuge or an immigrant in the ancient world, and basically all these verses were yanked out of context—just simply listed—and the conclusion was, "See, we're right; God is on our side." And that just grieves my heart. First of all it was just so theologically off, but it's also important to understand God is not political. I, as a preacher, am not for the political right; I'm not for the political left; I am jealous for the reputation of God. And it grieves me when we so diminish and devalue God—as if He's some sort of a celebrity—that He's on our side; therefore that makes us right. And often that flows out of just a gross misunderstanding of the difference between ancient Israel and modern-day America. That's just one example.

So when we begin this text, understand that in the ancient world God's blessings would have been rain, would have been prosperity with the crops; His judgments would have been drought, pestilence, disease, that sort of thing. So when the people go through several years of drought which creates a famine, they begin to think this must be the judgment of the Lord. I would not suggest that be a present-day, modern-day conclusion, but it was in the ancient world. So David seeks the presence of the Lord. We have seen throughout this study of 1 and 2 Samuel that this is kind of code language for when David is acting like a man after God's own heart, when he's in tune with God, when he's pursuing God. When he's in the right frame of mind, he pursues the presence of the Lord for answers. This is always indicative of David seeking to do the right thing.

God doesn't hesitate with the answer: it's because of bloody Saul. Somewhere along the way, Saul sought to wipe out the Gibeonites. The background of this story is that clear back in the time of Joshua, Joshua entered into a covenant agreement with the Gibeonites which are basically the Amorites, which by and large were a very peace-loving people. The agreement was: "If you allow us to live in the land (which is basically in the geography of the Benjamites), then in return for that we will give you back physical labor." So that was the agreement, and that agreement was honored generation after generation. We don't know exactly the details of this story—it's not something that's recorded—but clearly from the language, Saul had one of his explosive episodes. We've seen a number of these in our study: There was one time in Nob where Saul went off in an angry

outburst and slaughtered eighty-five priests in cold blood. So there is no doubt he's capable of such behavior—what we would refer to today as ethnic cleansing. He was determined to kill men, women, and children simply because of their ethnicity. So it was this bloody rampage that was a complete violation of the covenant and an absolute violation of the call of a king of Israel to establish shalom in the land. So now Saul is dead and gone. We can't really identify exactly when chronologically this happened, but there is this famine in the land. David seeks God, and God identifies something must be done to atone for this gross sin.

It's clear that David is jealous for the reputation of God. He wants the Gibeonites to once again honor the God of Israel. At the end of that paragraph, when they talk about **..."we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD,"** there's no question the Gibeonites are saying that with a great deal of sarcasm. The great God of Israel chose Saul and Saul engaged in this ethnic cleansing so their view of the God of Israel is very, very bad, and it's not hard to see why. David's passion is to restore the reputation of the God of Israel so he goes to them, asks what they want. They don't want money; they don't want a war, but in return what they do want is seven of Saul's sons—his descendants—and they will hang them. That will make atonement for what Saul did to them. That word atonement is a critical term. It is the word, Kippur as in Yom Kippur. It is to make atonement for the sin that was done against them. So David agrees. Verse 7:

> **But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the oath of the LORD which was between them, between David and Saul's son Jonathan. So the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, Armoni and Mephibosheth whom she had borne to Saul, and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite. Then he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the mountain before the LORD, so that the seven of them fell together; and they were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of barley harvest.** (Vs. 7-9)

So the name thing gets really confusing. Just like in modern times you might have John the father and a son named John—John Jr.—or you might have children named after certain relatives—very common in the ancient world. So you have a lot of repetition of names. Just like in the gospels, you had multiple Mary's, multiple John's, multiple Joseph's; it all kind of gets confusing. That happens a lot in this particular text, so the first thing we are told is that David was going to spare Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, because David made a covenant agreement with Jonathan that he would do that. So you have the contrast between Saul, who violated the covenant, and David with integrity keeping his covenant. He chooses the two remaining sons of Saul through one of Saul's concubines. One of them is named Mephibosheth, so it gets confusing. Saul had a son named Mephibosheth; that's probably why his other son Jonathan named his son Mephibosheth in honor of what would have been his uncle. So you have two sons and then you have five grandsons and they're handed over to the Gibeonites and they are put to death.

> **And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until it rained on them from the sky; and she allowed neither the birds of the sky to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night. When it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, then David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the open square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them on the day the Philistines struck down Saul in Gilboa. He brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of**

Jonathan his son from there, and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged. They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the grave of Kish his father; thus they did all that the king commanded, and after that God was moved by prayer for the land. (Vs. 10-14)

So you have Rizpah who lost two sons in the deal, who was a concubine of Saul's, who basically sets up a lean-to—puts a blanket up over a rock, creates a little tent—and she is determined to live there until God sends rain. Her mission is to keep the birds by day and the predatory animals by night from consuming the dead bodies. In ancient Israel, for a body to remain and simply be devoured by the birds and the predators was the ultimate shame. So she's determined not to allow that to happen and she will stay there as long as is necessary. David hears of her heroics; he's moved by that; he sends messengers all the way up to Jabesh-gilead (about fifty miles away, so a hundred mile round trip) to gather up the bones of Saul and Jonathan. Just that part of the story alone reminds us of how Saul and Jonathan died, how they were shamed by the Philistines, and how only the heroics of the men of Jabesh-gilead rescued the bones and brought them back. Now David's going to finish the job. He brings the bones back down south, puts them together with those who were hanged, and puts them all properly in the family burial plot. That chapter ends, in essence, by saying that God was pleased with this and restored the reign. Verse 15 starts a new story, a new glimpse:

Now when the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David went down and his servants with him; and as they fought against the Philistines, David became weary. Then Ishbi-benob, who was among the descendants of the giant, the weight of whose spear was three hundred *shekels* of bronze in weight, was girded with a new *sword,* and he intended to kill David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped him, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall not go out again with us to battle, so that you do not extinguish the lamp of Israel." (Vs. 15-17)

So this is now another glimpse of something that happened at some time when David was king. What you have ultimately will be four giant descendants of Goliath. Goliath was the famous giant from 1Samuel 17—probably the most familiar David story in the Bible. These are now his descendants and they are determined to get revenge on David. It's interesting that the giant who is the son of Goliath, that is fighting David—and David is becoming weary—and the text would seem to indicate he probably was going to lose this battle had not Abishai stepped in and rescued him. We are told that that giant had a **new sword**. Now that seems like an odd detail. Why do we need to know that? Probably lots of them had new swords. The importance of the detail is in understanding: typically in that culture a great father warrior would pass his weapons on to his son —probably the oldest son. But this oldest son did not have his father's sword. You remember why? All the way back when David defeated Goliath, which was really the introduction to our love affair with David, what did he take as a souvenir? Answer: he took Goliath's sword. So this is just a clever way of saying that this is now Goliath's son and he knows the story; he knows that David humiliated his father; he has a new sword and he is determined to get even. Maybe David was weary from battle; maybe he was a little bit older, later in years. We aren't really told, but Abishai steps in, slays the giant, and then the army together tells David they don't want him at the battle front anymore. These giants had one thing in mind—to get even with David, and there was just too much risk to have David at the battle front; David needed to go home and trust them with the battle.

The language about David being **the lamp of Israel** is in essence saying that David had led the nation back to God and these men were clearly aware that God was blessing David because David

was a man after God's own heart—we can't afford to lose this king! That's in essence what they just said**...he is the lamp of Israel**.

> **Now it came about after this that there was war again with the Philistines at Gob; then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was among the descendants of the giant. There was war with the Philistines again at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. There was war at Gath again, where there was a man of *great* stature who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; and he also had been born to the giant. When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck him down. These four were born to the giant in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.** (Vs. 18-22)

So, basically, just kind of a strange story about four sons of Goliath determined to get even and David's men ultimately killing them. You do have one of the sons named after his father Goliath. So this wouldn't be the 1 Samuel 17 Goliath; this would be Goliath, Jr. You also have this kind of strange description of this giant with six fingers on each hand, six toes on each foot—sounds like something out of *The Princess Bride! (laughter*) But it's just kind of odd. The idea is these were the descendants of the great Goliath; they were giants in the land. But now David was at a point in his life where perhaps he was no longer physically able to take on the giants, but because of David's actions—his faith and courage—those around him had taken up the fight and they were men of faith and courage; and they stepped up and they slayed the giants.

All right! So you just read this chapter at home in your quiet time. The application to everyday life seems abundantly clear. *(laughter)* But in case it's not, let's just talk through this a little bit. One of the values that scholars see is it's entirely possible that as the generations went by, there was significant confusion over why Saul's family dynasty was out and David's family dynasty was in. The story may well have been that David stepped up, slaughtered the family line of Saul, took the throne, and basically led a coup. That may be what Shimei was referring to when David was exiled out of Jerusalem when Absalom was chasing him. You remember Shimei was the guy that was up on the rocks and throwing rocks and dirt and cursing David. What he accused David of was basically slaughtering the family line of Saul. It's entirely possible this is what he was referring to and that story prevailed over the generations. So this may be the writer's attempt to correct that and to understand it was actually God that removed Saul for very good reason and it was God that told David that he needed to deal with Saul's bloody rampage and needed to provide an atonement to make it right. So rather than David being a blood-thirsty ruler, he was actually honoring God to make atonement because of Saul's breaking of the covenant.

There's no question that the point of this chapter—as the story is kind of summarized now at the end of Samuel—is to draw a comparison between Saul and David. Saul has not been part of the story line in 2 Samuel. All of a sudden he's all over this chapter, and that is the writer's way of drawing a comparison. It would be very easy to say, "You know, at the end of the day Saul failed; David failed; Saul and David were very much alike," but that would be a gross misunderstanding. It's not true at all. They were significantly different. David was a man after God's own heart. He wasn't a perfect man, but his life was characterized by confession and repentance and a passionate desire to do what's right to honor the God of Israel. Saul never lived that way. So the text goes back and offers a comparison.

The first comparison is a reminder of Saul and his character. He was rebellious; he was disobedient. He had this bad temper and at times he had these bloody outbursts of anger, just like the priests of

Nob, this is a reminder of this ethnic cleansing where he killed peace-loving men, women, and children simply because they were the wrong ethnicity. It so offended God that God refused to send rain, which brought famine to the land until David stepped up and somehow offered atonement to make it right in order to restore his name in Israel.

So you have Saul determined to break the covenant; you have David determined to keep the covenant promise that he made to Jonathan. So he spares Mephibosheth but he's true to the atonement price—offers the innocent sons of Saul—and they will have to die because of Saul's bloody rampage in order to regain the favor of God.

The story of David going and getting the bones of Saul and Jonathan causes us to go back and remember the story that Saul never really defeated the Philistines. The text told us the Philistines would be an enemy that would disrupt Saul through the duration of his reign as king because of his disobedience. And, at the end of the story, the Philistines ultimately defeated Saul and Jonathan, and they shamed the king of Israel by pinning their bodies up to a wall so that everyone that walked by could mock and shame the king of Israel. If it was not for the bravery of the men of Jabesh-gilead, that would have been the final chapter of Saul and David. But they rescued the body; they brought the bones back to Jabesh-gilead and eventually David was the one who defeated the Philistines. David was the one that brought peace to the land. David was the one that made it possible for the bones to be brought back and all of them properly buried in the family grave.

There is this reminder that David was the greatest king in the history of Israel, even though there were times when David made significant mistakes and it cost thousands of people their lives. The truth is over the forty year reign of David, the people experienced a level of peace, a level of prosperity, a level of shalom they had never known before and they had never known since to this day. What David accomplished among them was absolutely remarkable, because he was a man after God's own heart.

The snapshot of the fighting of the giants takes us back again to when we first fell in love with David. Saul was king of Israel, but Saul and his army were paralyzed with fear. Goliath was a giant that everyday came out and challenged the army of Israel and taunted the armies of the living God—and yet there wasn't one among them with the courage to step out and stop it. David was a little shepherd boy who came on the scene; he heard it one time and he could not take it. Basically he said, "Somebody needs to step up with the faith and courage and shut this guy up." No one else would, so as a young shepherd boy he stood up to the giant with his sling shot and slayed the giant —probably the most famous of all the David stories. It was this moment when we fell in love with this young shepherd boy who had the courage to trust God, and that really began the story of David.

So now we're comparing that with David as a leader. With Saul as leader, neither Saul nor his men would fight the giant. But now because of David's faith, because of David's courage, because David was a warrior, even when he reached a point in life where he could no longer slay the giants, he inspired his men around him that they would step up and they would slay the giants, because that's the kind of inspiring leader that David was. And it is this vivid reminder that David was so different from Saul in every way.

But we are reminded David was not a perfect leader, and there is still this longing in our hearts for that perfect ideal leader that would be the king that everybody longs for. We've been reminded again and again and again that the David story provides shadows; they're images; they're types of the perfect King to come—and that is again what we have in this chapter.

If you want to know where you find yourself in this story, the answer is easy: you are Saul! You say, "What do you mean?" You broke the covenant agreement with God. You broke your end of the deal. We've all sinned against a holy God. We've all broken the covenant, and as a result of that, we have incurred the judgment of God and we are under the judgment of God because of our sin, which raises the question: What will be the necessary atonement price to make it right?

There would have to be one who would come who would be one of us but He would be innocent—not guilty of our sin, but be perfect in every way. He would have to shed His blood to make atonement for our sin, in order that we as sinful people might stand right before a holy God, that God might lift His judgment and return to blessing, that God might bring the long-awaited rain that refreshes our soul. As we talked about last week—He is the living water that gives our dry and thirsty souls what it so desperately longs for. It is this picture, this reminder, that the king—the perfect King—would one day come. He would be the One that would make atonement because of our inability to keep the covenant, and as a result of that, to those who trust in Jesus as Savior, the blood would be applied to our sin and God would no longer be obligated to mediate out justice, but rather instead would pour out His blessing and bring the refreshing rain that our souls long for. It is actually a picture that **...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life**.

Our Father, we celebrate again today that when we were lost in our sins, You sent Jesus to shed His blood to be our Savior. God, it's easy for us to be critical of Saul until we remember that we are Saul. We broke the covenant. We sinned against a holy God and it was necessary for someone innocent of our crime to make atonement that we might move from Your judgment to Your blessing. God, that's what we celebrate today with thankful hearts! In Jesus' name, Amen

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Courage to Lead

2 Samuel 21:1-22

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Opening Discussion

1. What makes leadership hard? Why does it take courage to lead?

2. Bad leaders cause more bad behavior and good leaders inspire more good behavior. Why is that? Who inspires you to courageous leadership? Why?

Bible Study

1. II Samuel 21-24 is more like an appendix than the chronological end to the David story (which is found in I Kings 1, 2). These chapters provide snapshots of David's life as king. How would you define the 40 years of David's reign?

2. Read II Samuel 21:1-14. This paragraph invites the reader to draw a comparison between Saul as king and David as king. Describe the differences between the two kings. What hints does this text offer for comparisons?

3. Compare what really happened in this chapter with what Shimei accused David of in II Samuel 16:5-14. How might this incident from chapter 21 have affected the civil unrest in II Samuel 20:1, 2? What might David be unfairly accused of by the generations to follow? What does this tell us about hard leadership decisions? Does courageous leadership focus on trying to control one's legacy or on simply doing the right thing before God?

4. Read II Samuel 21:15-22. This paragraph is summed up in verse 22. What did David do and what affect did it have on others? What is the most famous of all the David stories (hint: I Samuel 17)? Why? How do courageous leaders affect other young leaders? What does a young leader need to become a giant slayer?

5. The story of David as king is a story of ups and downs (like any leader) but there were some consistent patterns in David's life that set him apart from Saul. What were those patterns? Do you think the words of I Samuel 13:14; 15:28 were ultimately true of David as king? Why or why not?

Application

1. What have you learned from David about leadership? How has David made you a better leader?

2. What would be necessary for you to become a more courageous leader? What would that look like in a very practical way?

3. For you to become a more courageous leader it might be necessary to spend considerable time in the wilderness school of leadership. Do you understand that is likely part of the calling to lead?

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