May 13/14, 2017

The Heart of a Spiritual Leader

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 24:1-25

Pastor Bryan Clark

Throughout our study in the Samuel series, we've defined leadership as influence. Any serious Christ-follower that wants to influence others for Christ is a leader as we've defined it. We've reminded ourselves several times, it takes courage to lead. Sometimes leadership is hard. Sometimes the burden is heavy; sometimes it's very lonely, and sometimes it's very confusing. And sometimes we, as leaders, fail, which raises the question: "What is it that God requires of a spiritual leader?" Thankfully, God does not require perfection, or we would all be out of a job. But we're still left with the question, "What *does* He require?" Well that's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 24, the last chapter of 2 Samuel.

As we've said before, the last four chapters of Samuel are not the chronological end to the story, but they are rather more like an appendix. They are four final glimpses or overviews of David as king. The actual chronological ending to the David story is found in 1 Kings, Chapters 1 and 2. We'll actually look at that the next two weeks, and then conclude our series. But it is interesting, then, that 2 Samuel ends this way. Scholars would say there were two major blunders in the life of David as king. One was the sin with Bathsheba; the second is what occurs in the final chapter of 2 Samuel. So after all we've been through together with David, why choose to end Samuel this way? Well that's a question we want to wrestle with as we go through this morning. Chapter 24, verse 1:

> **Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." The king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people." But Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king *still* see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?"** (*NASB, 2 Samuel 24:1-3)

So let's just go that far. We're told that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is angry. As a matter of fact, the language is pretty intense. *He burned with anger toward Israel*. We don't know exactly when in David's reign this occurred or exactly why God is angry with Israel. Although typically, when the language is this strong, they're guilty of idolatry. They always struggled with this tendency toward the gods of the Canaanites, the gods of the Philistines and engaging in idolatry, and that was typically what was happening when this language was used. So that's probably most likely. The text then tells us that God was angry.

Now one of the things that people in a 21st century American culture struggle with is the concept of God as an angry God. You hear it all the time. People want to believe that God is a God of love, but they want to dismiss the idea that God could possibly be a God of judgment, or a God of anger. As a matter of fact, you hear people often refer to the God of the Old Testament as a God of anger, as if somehow the God of the Old Testament is different than the God of the New Testament. But I would suggest to you if we're going to embrace the idea that God is a God of love, you must also embrace the idea that God is a God of anger. If God is truly loving, then He must, by necessity, also be a God of anger.

Let me illustrate it this way: Let's imagine that you have a child or a grandchild that you deeply love. Every day you send that child off to daycare. After a period of time you find out the adults at that daycare, every day are abusing your child. What would your response be? If you genuinely love that child, I'll tell you what it would be. You would be angry! And you would be right to be angry. It's because you love that child that that abuse makes you angry. If you in fact were simply unmoved by word of this abuse, you could not say you love that child. It would be a response of apathy or indifference. It is precisely because God loves His children that God is angry when His children are used and abused. Idolatry was a pathway of destruction, and it made God angry when His children would choose that path and draw others into the same destruction.

So God is angry at Israel, which then incites *David* to action. Now there's a lot of scholarly discussion around this concept of *inciting David*. Frankly, I think the whole thing is kind of blown out of proportion. I don't think it's that complicated. In essence, David somehow knows God is angry and the pattern has been that oftentimes God uses neighboring pagan nations to invade in order to discipline His children, to get them back on the right path. David knows it's entirely possible that may be what's coming, so he has a couple of options on the table. One option would be to be a godly king and to seek to call the nation to repentance, and to once again be a nation worshipping their God. But for reasons we are not told, David does not choose that option. Rather he chooses the option of taking a census. Now we would say, "Well what is the problem with that?" The problem with that is David was calculating: I wonder if our army is big enough to simply take on the Philistines ourselves. We know that God is upset with us, so God probably won't help us. So if the Philistines invade, is it possible we're now strong enough to do this without God's help? That's the heartbeat behind the census, the numbering of the soldiers.

Now it's interesting that over time God so blessed David and Israel that they were now sitting in a position of strength. They now had a massive army, and all of that was God's blessing and goodness to David. Yet David is willing to turn around and take what he's been given and use it, basically, to function as his own god without God's help.

You think about how common that is, that we take God's blessings—whether it's financial prosperity, power, position, talent, or whatever it is, and often in God's goodness He blesses us over and over again—and we often then use that in a sense as a substitute for God so that we can function as our own god. Well, that's exactly what David is doing. Throughout the David story, Joab has not been pictured as a man of remarkable spiritual discernment. And yet even Joab in the army, advised David that this is a really bad decision. Verse 4:

> **Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to register the people of Israel. They crossed the Jordan and camped in Aroer, on the right side of the city that is in the middle of the valley of Gad and toward Jazer. Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi, and they came to Dan-jaan and around to Sidon, and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and of the Canaanites, and they went out to the south of Judah, *to* Beersheba. So when they had gone about through the whole land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. And Joab gave the number of the registration of the people to the king; and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.** (Vs. 4-9)

So basically, north to south, east to west, the count comes back in. There are **eight hundred thousand** in Israel to fight, and there are **five hundred thousand** in Judah to fight, leaving 1.3 million soldiers to fight—really quite a strong, remarkable army. Verse 10:

> **Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."**

At some point, after ten months of head-counting, David has this deep sense of conviction that he has sinned—very similar to the time frame with his conviction over the sin with Bathsheba. One of the things that distinguished David from Saul was that David had a deep sense of brokenness over his sin. The difference between Saul and David was not that Saul sinned and David didn't. David sinned; Saul sinned. The difference was Saul was consistently characterized by nothing more than being sorry. Saul got caught in the cycle of sin/sorry, sin/sorry, sin/sorry, which was the pattern of his life before God. David was not like that.

One of the purposes for this final chapter is to give an overview of who David was as *a man after God's own heart*. Was he perfect? No. But one of the consistent patterns of David is David had a deep sense of conviction over his sin. When David sinned, there was true confession. Confession literally means to agree with God that my behavior, my words, my attitude—whatever it is—is offensive in the presence of a holy God. And what is implied in true confession is: because it's offensive to God, it must stop, and it must stop now! That's very different from the sin/sorry, sin/sorry, sin/sorry cycle—which is just simply unacceptable. It will not do! If you're going to be a serious Christ-follower, and you want to be used by God, there is a significant difference between sin/sorry, sin/sorry, sin/sorry and true confession. With true confession, then, comes true repentance. Repentance is turning and going the other way. It's putting a stake in the ground. It's a clear sense, "I am done with this. I will do whatever is necessary to get this dealt with, but I will not continue this pattern." This is a consistent pattern with David. He doesn't make excuses; there are no rationales; there's no explaining this away; there's no sin management. There's no damage control; there's no throwing anyone else under the bus. David is clear: "I have sinned. What I have done before God is foolish," and that is a mark of *a man after God's own heart*.

> **When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the LORD says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you."'" So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what answer I shall return to Him who sent me." Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."** (Vs. 10-14)

So God sends Gad the prophet to David. This is rather unusual, but for whatever reason, God gives David three options. Now again, people in our culture today tend to struggle with this idea of God as a God of judgment. But it's helpful to go back to our illustration. If you had a child or a grandchild whom you deeply loved, that was sent every day to a daycare, and then you find the adults there are abusing that child, is it not true that you would not only be angry, but you would want the authorities to do something? I don't think there's a person in the room that would just walk away satisfied that nothing was done. So why is it permissible for you to ask for judgment when your children are damaged, but somehow it's unfair for God to do the same? So God comes

to David, who was not an ordinary citizen. David was the king, and he had driven his nation further into idolatry because of his actions. God needed to send a clear message through David that this is simply not acceptable behavior.

So three choices: seven years of famine, three months of an enemy who attacks and pursues them and all that goes with that, or three days of pestilence or disease. David chooses the three days of pestilence, and basically what he says is a "one-eighty" from where he was before, again reflecting true repentance. David, before, was willing to say, "Can we count the army and move forth by our own power without God?" But now, as he looks at the possibility of the invading Philistines, he does not want to fall into the hands of the pagan nations around him, so he puts himself in the hands of God, who he believes to be a God of mercies. So now he places his nation and himself in the hands of God, because it's in God he trusts most.

> **So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now relax your hand!" And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house."** (Vs. 15-17)

S**eventy thousand men** died! There would be a tendency to say seventy thousand *innocent* people, but we forget that the story starts that God is angry with Israel because of their sin, probably their idolatry—so they are far from innocent. But God is stepping in with the judgment and it is serious. The scene is dramatic as God's angel is moving toward Jerusalem. David sees this and his heart is broken for his people. He says to God, "This is all my fault. I have sinned; I have brought this on." Even though the people were in idolatry and deserving of judgment, it is right to say that David, had he been a better leader in this moment, could have possibly prevented this. What might have happened if David would have chosen to step up with courage as a king and call the nation to repent before God for their sin? It is possible the nation may have repented, and there may have been revival in the land instead of this devastation. But when David chose the census, he drove the nation deeper into its idolatry, and now David is owning this as the leader. In essence, what David says is, "This is my fault," and asks God to, "Kill me and my family, but let these people live."

Again we're wrestling with the question: why would this be the last chapter of the Samuel story... of the David story? Because the chapter is illustrating that David is *a man after God's own heart*. David was characterized by true confession and repentance, and David clearly, consistently manifested the heart of a righteous leader, of what the Hebrew calls a *tzadik*. David consistently served his people. He consistently loved and shepherded his people, and now, in this moment, he is willing to disadvantage himself to advantage the community by saying to God, "God, take me and my family out and let the people live," which again is a reflection of David's heart as a leader and dramatically different from the heart of Saul.

> **So Gad came to David that day and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded. Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over toward him; and Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king. Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come**

to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be held back from the people." Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you." However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy *it* from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel. (Vs. 18-25)

God is moved by David's gesture. He stops the angel from more destruction, and He instructs David to go to a very public place and make a public sacrifice. A threshing floor would have been a high, flat, rocky area, where they pile the grain. When the wind blows, it blows the chaff away; the grain remains. That's what a threshing floor was. This was actually quite a famous threshing floor. So David begins to move to that place. Araunah, the owner, sees David, comes down, asks him what he's doing. David tells him and he offers to give David the land and everything he needs to make the sacrifice. This is one of the great Old Testament moments. David refuses to take the land for free, and responds by simply saying, "*I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing*."

David understood that worship is to be a sacrifice, and he simply refused to offer to God that which cost him nothing. It's critically important in a 21st century consumer America to understand that worship of God—to be a serious Christ-follower—is not meant to be a hobby that is there for your convenience, as long as there is nothing else to do—no sporting event or other place to go, as long as there is nothing else making demands of me, and I'm not tired that day. Then it's like a hobby on the side and, "I think I will participate." It is supposed to cost you; it is supposed to be a sacrifice. That is the essence of worship. This goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 4. It's the story of Cain and Abel. This was the core problem. Abel gave the best that he had to God. Cain was willing to give a little leftover that he didn't need, and God rejected that worship. That's a consistent thread all the way through the Old Testament, on into the New Testament. Jesus Himself said, "*If you're going to follow Me, count the cost*." It is going to be costly. You have to decide what you're going to give up. You have to decide that you're going to rearrange your life, to be serious about being a Christ-follower, and live for the things that ultimately matter. Jesus said, *"If you're going to follow Me, you take up your cross and follow Me."* He could not have been clearer.

This threshing floor was the very place where Abraham was called to offer Isaac his son on the altar. It's the place where Solomon will build the temple, and it is a stone's throw away from the very place where the Son of God, descendent of David, would sacrifice His life and shed His blood on a cross in atonement for sin. He would give His very life in order to make atonement for sin.

Paul, in Romans 12, makes the argument that based on what Jesus has done for us, for us to give our lives back as a sacrifice is simply a reasonable response. If the things of God are not a priority, you would have to wonder, "*Do you really understand what was done for you?*"

Years ago, a missionary told a story about a ministry on an island, and at Christmas time one of the natives brought him a beautiful rare shell as a Christmas present. The missionary knew that the only place where that shell could be found was on the opposite side of the island, which required a two-day walk there and a two-day walk back. So he made the comment to the native how long of a walk it was to get the shell, to which the native replied, *"Long walk part of the gift*."

That's exactly what David is saying. I understand that in this culture and it's probably been true in all cultures, that there are always those who want to believe they can be serious about the Jesus thing, but they have no interest in the church. They love Jesus but they don't love the church. You hear this kind of stuff all the time. But it's important to understand the New Testament knows nothing of that kind of a distinction. Churches are not perfect. Churches often get messy, but the truth is the church is the visible expression of Christ on the earth. The church is His bride. The church is His lover. When you insult the church, you're insulting His lover. And the reality is: "*If you're a serious Christ-follower, you are serious about the church."* People that want to believe that they are serious about God but have no interest in the church, no interest in serving, no interest in giving time, no interest in gathering to worship—no real interest in getting serious about the church—at the end of the day, I've heard all the excuses. I've heard all the rationalizations; I've heard all of the reasons. But let's just call it what it is. At the end of the day, God isn't all that important; it simply doesn't fit in my time; it doesn't fit in my schedule; it's just not a priority with me. If you're going to believe I have my ticket to heaven and that's enough, otherwise I want to live my own life my own way, at least be honest enough to say that. The reality is: if you are going to be a serious Christ-follower, it is supposed to cost you something. The sacrifice is part of the worship. You sacrifice time; you sacrifice treasure; you sacrifice talent. You rearrange your life in such a way that you say, *"This is going to matter to me!"*

Years ago, I came across this. I tweaked it just a little bit to update it. But it goes like this:

> *Funny how a ten-dollar bill looks so big when you take it to church, but so small when you take it to the store.*
>
> *Funny how big an hour serving God looks, and how small sixty minutes are when playing golf, or fishing, or playing basketball.*
>
> *Funny how long a couple of hours are spent at church, but how short they are when watching a movie or playing a video game.*
>
> *Funny how we get thrilled when a football game goes into overtime, but we complain when the sermon is longer (laughter) than the usual time.*
>
> *Funny how we believe what the media or the internet says, but we question the Bible.*
>
> *Funny how we can't seem to make attending a worship service a priority, but we can schedule about anything else at a moment's notice.*
>
> *Funny how we say God is really important to us, but everything seems to be more important.*

It's really important to understand, if you are going to consider yourself to be a serious Christ-follower, it does require sacrifice. It does require rearranging your life in such a way that God gets the best of what I have.

So why would this be the last chapter in Samuel? It is to reveal to us what God requires of a leader. David was *a man after God's own heart*. God Himself said that. What God requires of a spiritual leader is he or she is a person after God's own heart. So how would that manifest itself?

Number one: Through true confession of sin. If you are serious about being a Christ-follower, if you really are a man or a woman after God's own heart, it means we are serious about sin. We have to get out of the sin/sorry, sin/sorry, sin/sorry cycle. At some point we have to realize that simply is unacceptable—it will not do—and at some point we confess our sin, which is to agree with God that this is offensive in the eyes of a holy God, and what's implied in that is: therefore, it must stop! This brings true repentance. True repentance is to put a stake in the ground. No more excuses, no more rationalizations, no more sin management, no more damage control. I put a stake in the ground and I say, "*I'm done with that*." I'll do whatever is necessary to get that addressed, but it must stop. You do not have to do this alone. We have many resources to help you with this. We'll walk through it with you, but at some point you have to look at sin and say, "It must stop!"

Second of all, it's to have the heart of a servant—the heart of a *tzadik*—to understand the call to leadership is not about ego, not about pride, not about power, not about position, not about making money. It's not about me somehow being great, but instead the call to leadership is the heart of a servant, a *tzadik*. It's to say my calling is to serve the people I've been called to lead. It's to disadvantage myself if necessary to advantage the people, to love and shepherd others. It is ultimately the call to give myself away, to create pockets of flourishing that are at least a glimpse of the world as God intended it to be.

And lastly, there has to be this understanding: If I am truly a man or a woman after God's own heart, then I understand this is the call to sacrifice. This is the call to deny myself. This is the call to take up my cross and follow. To be serious as a Christ-follower is to rearrange my life in such a way that the things of God are my priority. It should cost me something. It should cost me my time...my talent...my treasure. At the end of the day, it is a sacrifice. It costs me!

In this culture where there are a hundred and one things pulling at you every day, you have to make some hard decisions about what is ultimately going to matter and then rearrange your life accordingly to live for the things that really matter forever. That is what defines a man or a woman after God's own heart. And that is what God requires of a spiritual leader.

> *Our Father, we celebrate this morning the life of David with its ups and downs. We're reminded David was not a perfect man. But when the story is finally at the end and we look back, what we do see is David was a man after Your own heart. And, God, that is what we want. Lord, I know for the overwhelming majority of people seated here this morning, that is what they want. That's why they are here. They want to be serious about being a Christ-follower. They want their lives to make a difference in this world. God, help us to understand what it means to be a man or a woman after Your own heart, Lord, that we might be serious about sin, that we might give ourselves away and serve the people around us, that we might understand it is costly. That's the point—that we might count the cost and pay the price, that You might raise up an army of people from among this crowd who will dedicate their lives to that which will matter forever. Lord, that's my prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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May 13/14, 2017

The Heart of a Spiritual Leader

Courage to Lead

2 Samuel 24:1-25

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What does God expect from a spiritual leader? We are defining a spiritual leader as anyone who is a serious Christ follower who wants to influence others for Christ.

2. What are your greatest struggles and challenges as a spiritual leader?

Bible Study

1. Read II Samuel 24:1-9. What are some other times when David's tendency towards self-sufficiency got him into trouble? Why do leaders struggle with this tendency?

2. What do you think David should have done rather than take a census? What do we learn from that? In what ways do we do the same thing as David?

3. Read II Samuel 24:10-14. What defines true confession and repentance? How was David different from Saul? Is being sorry the same thing?

4. Read II Samuel 24:15-25. What do we learn about David's heart in this part of the story? Was David's heart to serve his people or use his people?

5. Why did David insist on paying for the threshing floor to offer his sacrifice of worship to the LORD? What do we learn from this? Is worship about going through the motions so we can check it off our list or is it about something more?

Application

1. What made David special as a leader was his heart; he was a man after God's own heart. In this chapter his heart is revealed (summarized) by a heart for confession, repentance, for his people and his heart for true worship. How are you doing in each of these areas?

    a. Confession: is there any area of your life where you need to confess sin? Confession is agreeing with God that a particular area of your life is offensive to God.

b. Repentance: if an area of life is offensive to God, that implies it must stop now. Repentance is turning the other way, moving a different direction. In other words, repentance means I'm done with that sin.

c. Heart for the people: do you care more about the people you lead or about yourself? Are you truly willing to disadvantage yourself to advantage them?

d. Sacrifice: What does it really cost you to be a Christ follower? What evidence is there that your service to God is the most important thing in your life? Does God get the best of your time, talent and treasure?

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