

Message #36

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Life of David

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DAVID AND LEAVING A LEGACY OF GREATNESS

2 SAMUEL 23-24

INTRODUCTION

I came across a fascinating opinion piece years ago in *USA Today* written by one of its regular contributors. It was entitled "People Should Think More About Death." (William R. Mattox Jr., 10/28/1999) The author pointed out that people in our culture have a tendency to avoid consideration of death and the implications which it has for us now. He concluded with this story:

"The last funeral I attended ... was held a few blocks from the U.S. Capitol for a guy named Bill Pelt, who had spent many of his years on this earth living in the alley of the shadow of death.

"Back in the early 1980s, Pelt was a homeless alcoholic who sometimes hung out at a park on Capitol Hill. One summer day, a church youth group... put on a skit in the park about a man who rose from the dead. Pelt was drawn to the story and began talking with the minister of the Capitol Hill church that sponsored the event. The minister agreed to give Pelt a janitorial job and to help him discover how God could transform his life.

"That day in the park proved to be a turning point in Pelt's life. He dove into his new job, moved in with a church member and, in time, began working with the church youth.

"Indeed, his funeral... featured eulogies from about a dozen people, most of them young folks who had been profoundly influenced by Pelt's transformed life. As I listened to their often-moving words, I couldn't help but marvel at the irony of the situation. I mean, here were all of these people in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol, paying tribute not to a congressman or a Cabinet secretary or a Supreme Court justice, but to a humble janitor.

“In the democracy of the dead, all men at last are equal,’ observed a prominent 19th century legislator, Sen. John James Ingalls. ‘There is neither rank nor station nor prerogative in the republic of the grave.’

“Were he still with us, janitor Bill Pelt would probably second Sen. Ingalls’ statement. But he might amend it to add that, in the contemplation of death, all men, regrettably, are not equal. For some men never really come to terms with the issues surrounding death, and some never taste the abundant life that Bill Pelt experienced after he did.” I would further amend that to add that some never leave a legacy of greatness like Bill Pelt did.

King David did leave such a legacy. As we approach the end of our study of his life, we need to remember that his origins were no more impressive than were those of Bill Pelt. He was the youngest son in a large family of shepherds from a small town in the hills of Judah. Yet he left a legacy of greatness. We have seen that he was certainly not perfect. He was a very flawed individual. Yet because of his relationship with the Lord, he left a legacy of greatness. In this there is hope for us.

We are going to skip over #22 in 2 Samuel, which is a slight variation of Psalm 18. I plan to break down Chapters 23 and 24 today into three sections. Next week we will finish up with the transition of the transfer of the kingship to Solomon. Then after that we will move on to another study, perhaps to 1 Timothy, which in this election season may have relevance with its focus on Biblical leadership.

I.

So let’s look at #23 of 2 Samuel vv. 1-7 (which is on p. 275 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) as we consider the topic of SUBMISSION TO A DIVINE CALLING. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. SUBMISSION TO A DIVINE CALLING) I pointed out last week that we are dealing with a literary feature called a chiasm. In #21 we learned about a famine, which was the result of King Saul’s sin. In #24 we will learn about a pestilence, which is the result of King David’s sin. Next in #21 we learned about four military heroes who beat up on Philistine giants. Just before #24 we will learn about the military leaders who served under King David. In the middle of this chiasm is the psalm in #22 and these last words of David at the beginning of #23.

The narrator introduces the last words of David in v. 1 of #23: **“Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of**

the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel:" These are not the very last words which David ever uttered. This is the last public testimony of David. This is like his last will and testament.

There are two things which the author notes about his background. One is that David was raised on high, and the other is that he was anointed by God. David is not described as one who pulled himself up by his bootstraps. Rather he is one who was called by God to a specific role. Also David was anointed. God sent the prophet Samuel to go to him when David was only a teenage shepherd and to anoint him as the future king of Israel. This shocked everyone, including his own family. There were many experiences which David would have to undergo before he could become king. He would also be not just a great king, but also an inspired psalmist whose Old Testament writings we still study today.

It is likewise a divine calling which distinguishes genuine believers today from other people. The New Testament refers several times to Christians as people who are called of God. For example, in Romans #1 v. 6 the Apostle Paul (ROMANS 1:6) refers to Christians as **"you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ..."** This is an effectual calling. The New Testament does not use this terminology to describe all who have ever heard the gospel. It is used only of Christians.

Look next at vv. 2-4, which quote the words of David: (PROJECTOR OFF) **"The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth."** Notice that there appears to be a reference to the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is not fully explained in the Old Testament, but David seems to have some awareness of the Holy Spirit.

David here speaks of the ideal ruler of God's people. The ideal ruler is both righteous and refreshing. He is like the sunlight after the rain. David only partially fulfilled this picture. A more complete fulfillment lies in the future.

Verse 5: **"For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?"** David is making reference here to the promises of God made to him and his descendants in #7. This is known as the Davidic Covenant. In that covenant God promised to make of David's descendants a royal line that would go on forever. There will be a descendant who will establish the throne of God's kingdom forever. It will be an eternal throne of an eternal kingdom. This promise will find fulfillment in

Jesus, the descendant of David. In #7 these promises are not specifically called an eternal covenant, but they are here.

According to vv. 6 & 7, **“But worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away, for they cannot be taken with the hand; but the man who touches them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they are utterly consumed with fire.”** There is a recognition here that this divine calling, this participation in God’s kingdom program is not without opposition. There will be enemies and opponents who are like thorns. You get hurt from touching them. Even the special descendant of David would be wounded by thorns. So one must normally be armed to deal with them. Eventually there will be judgment for these enemies.

David’s greatness comes from submission to a divine calling. In the New Testament all genuine followers of Jesus are said to have a divine calling. First and foremost, this calling is to salvation, to becoming members of His family. But within that context, God has an individual plan for us. In 1 Corinthians #12 the Apostle Paul compares the family of God to a body. We all have a role to play in this divine body. Greatness comes from submission to whatever that role is.

Bill Pelt was the janitor who found greatness as a youth worker. He left a legacy among the young people with whom he ministered. I have told you on several occasions about my friend Harry. I first came to know him when he volunteered many years ago to help as a youth leader. In more recent years he left a legacy of greatness as a janitor. For he was convinced that he was serving Christ in helping teachers in an elementary school and trying to learn the names of the hundreds of students who passed by him every day and being a blessing to all of them. When he left that school, teachers and students cried to lose him. The point is that we can leave a legacy of greatness in whatever situation in life in which we find ourselves if we determine to submit to our divine calling and live out the Christian life in our circumstances, whether that is in the family or a nursing home or work or school or church or neighborhood or jail.

II.

We find out in the second part of #23 that a legacy of greatness also involves PARTICIPATION WITH A COMMITTED TEAM. (II. PROJECTOR ON--- PARTICIPATION WITH A COMMITTED TEAM) Such is the message of vv. 8-29. In assessing David’s greatness we have to keep in mind that the Bible relates a significant portion of that greatness to courage and bravery and leadership in physical warfare. David was great in fighting and killing bad guys. He experienced the blessing of God in doing that. His accomplishment that first brought him to the limelight was killing the giant Goliath.

There is a certain strain within Christianity which is negative toward participation in war and in the military. Jesus did praise those who were peacemakers. But a unique demographic group in the Gospels for whom He reserved special praise was centurions, military officers. On several occasions they expressed faith in Jesus, and He praised them for that in return.

So we can appreciate those who serve in our military forces. This doesn't mean that everything that our leaders do with our military forces is right in the eyes of God. The United States does not have the same promises which were given to Israel. American foreign policy is not inherently righteous, although we as a country can claim the promise of God that those who bless the descendants of Abraham will be blessed. (Genesis 12)

We are not going to examine every verse in this second part of the chapter. In vv. 8-12 three warriors described as "the three mighty men" are noted for their exploits. They are Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah. We don't know much about them other than what is described here. They are noted for their skill and courage and strength in beating up on the Philistines. All three were successful in overcoming tremendous odds in killing Philistines in difficult situations.

In v. 10 and v. 12 it is noted that "the Lord brought about a great victory." So there is a recognition of the divine source of their strength and their success in battle.

Verses 13 -17 describe one particular incident involving David's military leaders: **"And three of the thirty chief men went down and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Adullam, when a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. And David said longingly, 'Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!' Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the Lord and said, 'Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?' Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did."** These may be three different mighty men than the ones described in the preceding verses. Adullam was about twelve miles from Bethlehem, David's hometown.

It was at Adullam where David found a place of refuge for himself and his supporters when he was on the run from King Saul. So that is probably when this incident happened. What this incident reveals is both the commitment of David's men to David and David's commitment to them and to the Lord. David's focus is not upon satisfying his own personal desires but upon worshiping God and giving thanks for the sacrifice of his men. He appreciates the fact that he is part of a committed team.

In vv. 18-39 we have a description of David's officer corps. This group is described as "the thirty." There were actually more than that number who served here as officers. But some were probably killed in battle. Others moved on to other positions in government. Additional men were added as the years went by.

Some of the names in this list are familiar to us. Abishai in v. 18 was the brother of General Joab. He is described as the head of the thirty. The last one on the list, in v. 39, is Uriah, who was the husband of Bathsheba and the victim of David's murderous plot. In v. 34 appears the name of Eliam who is elsewhere called the father of Bathsheba. His father is said to be Ahithophel the counselor to King David who sided with Absalom in the son's rebellion. We wonder if David's treatment of his granddaughter had something to do with Ahithophel's change in loyalties.

All but twelve in this list are from the tribe of Judah. Three are from Benjamin, two are from the tribe of Ephraim, one is from Dan, one is from Gad, and three are Gentiles, including Uriah. One is the son of a priest.

The point here is that great leaders recognize that they are part of a team. They give credit to those team members. Godly leaders ultimately give the primary credit to God. Their focus is not upon themselves.

Jim Collins has served in a variety of capacities in the business world. In writing his book *Good to Great*, he analyzed the top eleven American companies who proved to be the most successful over time. One of the characteristics that he discovered about their CEOs was that they were self-effacing. In other words, they minimized their own contributions and gave great credit to their team members. Their appreciation was genuine.

Such is true of great Christian leaders. In reading the letters of the Apostle Paul one cannot help but notice how often he expresses appreciation for his fellow workers in the ministry. Such should be the case with us.

III.

In #24 we find a focus upon OVERCOMING SIN BY TRUSTING IN GOD'S SACRIFICE. (III. OVERCOMING SIN BY TRUSTING IN GOD'S SACRIFICE) Verse 1 tells us, **"Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'"**

The first issue here is the anger of the Lord toward Israel. We are not told the reason for this anger. One reasonable possibility is the rebellion against David led by Absalom and then by Sheba. A large portion of the country seemed to side with these rebels against David. David was the anointed king, and the one appointed by God to lead the nation. The people were wrong to rebel against his leadership. Perhaps that is the issue here.

Then we are told that God incited David to conduct a census. Later David admits that he was wrong in doing this. It is not clear why this is the case. There is a theological issue involved in this. How can David's actions be sinful if God was the prime mover behind David's actions. The best explanation seems to be that God is sovereign and people are responsible. Prior to Israel's flight from slavery in Egypt, we are told on multiple occasions that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. At the same time Pharaoh is responsible for his rebellion against the true God. So it seems in our case that David has done a wrong action. At the same time God is accomplishing His sovereign purposes through David's misdeed.

To further complicate things, we have a passage in 1 Chronicles #21 v. 1 which describes this same incident. (1 CHRONICLES 21:1) There we are told, **"Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel."** So initially it appears that Satan has a role in this census deal.

A couple of messages ago some of you may remember that I explained that the original Hebrew word is *satan*, from which we get Satan. The original word meant "adversary." In the places in the Old Testament where this word is used in the sense of Satan, it seems that it always has the article in front of it, what would be equivalent our "the," as in "the adversary." Here the article does not appear. So I am inclined to think that it should be translated as "an adversary." My interpretation, which is not certain, is that the author is saying that an adversary rose up against Israel, meaning an enemy nation

threatened Israel. Perhaps that is why David was motivated to conduct a census in order to assess the military strength of the country.

Now look at vv. 2-4: **“So the king said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, ‘Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people, that I may know the number of the people.’ But Joab said to the king, ‘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 it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?’ But the king’s word prevailed against Joab and the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to number the people of Israel.”**

General Joab sees a problem with conducting this census. The reason for this is not clear. Taking a census by itself does not seem to be a violation of any Scriptural rule. Perhaps pride is involved. Perhaps there is a lack of trust in God in the face of a pending attack from an enemy. There certainly seems to be no direction from the Lord to do this. When David has sought out direction from the Lord in regard to major decisions, he has received it.

Let’s look at vv. 5-8: **“They crossed the Jordan and began from Aroer, and from the city that is in the middle of the valley, toward Gad and on to Jazer. Then they came to Gilead, and to Kadesh in the land of the Hittites; and they came to Dan, and from Dan they went around to Sidon, and came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites; and they went out to the Negeb of Judah at Beersheba. So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.”**

The census takers cover the country by moving in a counter-clockwise direction. It takes them almost ten months. Joab is in charge, which may suggest a military purpose to the census. It would seem that they are counting men of fighting age.

Such is the conclusion born out in v. 9: **“And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: in Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000.”** There is uncertainty about the meaning of the label “800,000 valiant men who drew the sword.” This is certainly a big number.

Verse 10: **“But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And 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 done very foolishly.’”** David’s conscience convicts him that he has sinned greatly and that he has done very foolishly. Age and experience are no guarantee that we can’t mess up badly.

Verses 11-14: **“And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ‘Go and say to David, “Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.”’ So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, ‘Shall three 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 decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.’ Then David said to Gad, ‘I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.’”** Gad is a prophet and advisor who was first mentioned in 1 Samuel 22:5, when David was on the run from King Saul.

This is a unique offer from the Lord which is without precedent in the Bible. David chooses door number three. He prefers a short time of suffering which places him and his people more directly into the hands of the Lord for divine discipline.

Verse 15: **“So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men.”** This judgment is partly for the sin of David and partly for the sin of Israel. “The appointed time” could be the end of the third day. But what follows suggests that the time of judgment has been cut short. So the other alternative is that the appointed time is the time of the evening sacrifice on the first day of judgment.

As we consider our own time of worldwide suffering from the coronavirus we cannot help but wonder if the Lord is handing out some kind of judgment or discipline upon us. Certainly God is sovereign and has divine purposes for all that He does, or at least for all which He allows. At the very least this pandemic is a reminder of our own mortality and fragility. It is a warning against the pride of humanity which might think that human wisdom and human progress are unstoppable.

Verse 16: **“And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, ‘It is enough; now stay your hand.’ And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.”** The term “angel of the Lord” is generally a reference in the Old Testament to the Son of God, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead.

God's purposes are immutable. They are unchanging. But a change in the behavior of man sometimes results in a modification of God's announced plan. The result is always a part of the plan of God which He had in mind all along. The death here of 70,000 men, perhaps all or most of whom are fighting men, would have put a dent in the military force which was perhaps related to David's source of pride.

Verse 17: **"Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, 'Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house.'"** Here we see evidence of David's greatness. The great shepherd king is offering himself as a substitute for the wrath of God against his people. Such will be the mission of the future Son of David.

Verse 18: **"And Gad came that day to David and said to him, 'Go up, raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.'"** Jebus was the name of Jerusalem when it was occupied by the Canaanites. So Araunah is a Gentile, a descendant of one of the original occupants of Jerusalem. The wrath of God is here stopped. But it is not yet satisfied. An atoning sacrifice is necessary.

Verses 19-25: **"So David went up at Gad's word, as the Lord commanded. And when Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming on toward him. And Araunah went out and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground. And Araunah said, 'Why has my lord the king come to his servant?' David said, 'To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be averted from the people.' Then Araunah said to David, 'Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king.' And Araunah said to the king, 'May the Lord your God accept you.' But the king said to Araunah, 'No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.' So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel."** In the end it is substitutionary sacrifices on the threshing floor of Araunah which satisfy the wrath of God.

Just where was this threshing floor? In 2 Chronicles #3 v. 1 (2 CHRONICLES 3:1) we are told, **"Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite."** Ornan is the name used for Araunah in the parallel account of this story in 1 Chronicles #21. This threshing floor on Mount Moriah becomes the site of the temple in Jerusalem.

This place was also the site of a significant event in the life of Abraham. In Genesis #22 vv. 1 & 2 (GENESIS 22:1) we are told this story: **“After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ (GENESIS 22:2) He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”**

Notice that this proposed place of sacrifice is the land of Moriah. Abram brings Isaac here and binds him on an altar. As he is about to kill this special son on the altar, the text says that the angel of the Lord intervenes and stops him. He provides a nearby ram caught in a bush to be a substitute sacrifice. What God in the end would not permit any human to do, He would Himself provide one day by the offer of His Son.

Such it is that we read in the New Testament in Luke #23 v. 33 (LUKE 23:33): **“And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.”** The Latin word for “Skull” with which we are familiar is “Calvary.” Calvary was connected to Mount Moriah and was near the Temple Mount, just outside of the gates of the city of Jerusalem. It was here that our Lord provided the final sacrifice for our sin. It is this Son of David and Son of God, Jesus, who is the basis for our salvation. If we put our trust in Him, we will receive forgiveness for sins and the gift of eternal life. David three thousand years ago offered animals as an atoning sacrifice. The Lord God of heaven offered his unique Son as the final sacrifice two thousand years ago.

How appropriate it is that the Books of Samuel conclude with this incident. Any legacy of greatness which we can leave has to be centered upon the ultimate sacrifice which was made on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Any greatness which we can ever offer will come from submission to a divine calling, participation with a committed team, and promotion of trust in God’s sacrifice, ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ.