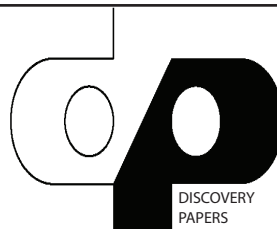


A LEADER WHO WAS LOVED

SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.



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2 Samuel 23:1-39
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2 Samuel 23:1-39

Last week I spent a night aboard the Balclutha. She is a 19th century three-masted square-rigged ship currently docked at Hyde Street Pier in San Francisco. My visit was part of a fifth grade field trip for two of my daughters. The goal was to experience life as it might have been sailing aboard that ship.

As it turns out, this ship is a remarkable one. A crew of at least 26 men was required to handle the 25 different sails. The Balclutha rounded Cape Horn—that stretch of ocean in between the tip of South America and Antarctica—not once, but seventeen times. This is often considered one of the most dangerous routes in sailing because it includes gale force winds, monstrous waves, and blinding storms.

The fifth graders didn't experience these perils, but they did learn how to work as a team. They learned how to follow orders. Several of them learned how to give orders to their peers. They learned to speak up when they had questions. In short, they learned a lot about leadership. In order to operate a ship of that complexity and power, you need a good captain. You need good officers, strong leaders as mates, and a diligent crew. It takes a lot of effective leadership to sail the Balclutha.

And though they may not have experienced Cape Horn conditions, they did learn how hard the wind can blow on the top deck of a ship at a San Francisco pier in the summer.

Today we're continuing in our series on the life of David, called *A Life of Passion*. We're in the last chapter of his life that we've labeled "Elder." Our current section of 2 Samuel looks back over David's life with summary and reflections.

Last week we heard a beautiful Psalm from David expressing his willingness to cry out to the LORD and God's faithfulness to answer him. As we move on to 2 Samuel 23, we'll see another short psalm followed by descriptions of David's mighty men: his elite soldiers who followed him faithfully. This section is about David as a leader.

We'll see some of the lessons that my fifth graders learned aboard the great Balclutha. We see what makes a leader great. We'll observe how his followers regard him. And we'll learn a lot about the relationship between a leader and his or her community.

But most of all, we'll see David's unique kind of leadership. And we'll observe that David was, above all things, a leader who was loved.

Part of the reason we wanted to study the life of David is that we learn by seeing people in action. You can learn some things about leadership from a book or from a seminar. But the really powerful kind of learning happens when you see a leader in action. You learn the most about leadership from being around leaders, not following their seven secrets to success.

So, this morning isn't just, "5 Lessons on Becoming a Great Leader." These aren't abstract principles. We are learning about leadership from a leader. We know David. If you've been with us this year, then you've been around David for a while now. We've walked with him through marriage, success, failure, losing loved ones, repentance, frustration, indecision, impulsiveness, and worship. From all of these stories, we know David.

We are reflecting on what we've already seen in the life of this man, rather than simply listing principles of leadership. Because when we look back on his life, we realize that David was an exceptional leader. This doesn't make up for any of his many shortcomings that we've become familiar with. But today we recognize him as having been a great leader for most of his life.

Thinking about David in this way will invite us to ask questions about ourselves. I define leadership as how you act in any setting in which you have influence. This means that we are all leaders in some capacity. Children have influence in their homes, employees have influence in their jobs, students have influence in their classes. And of course, managers and executives and parents and teachers have influence because of their position. Every single one of us is a leader somewhere.

One way that I prepared for this preaching series was to take a class at Regent two years ago entitled, "Leadership Lessons from the Life of David." David can teach us a lot. Let's see what we can learn about leadership from him.

Connected to God for the sake of the community

The poetry that begins our passage is a first person account by David describing his style of leadership. It is initially described as the oracle of David, who is the anointed of the God of Jacob. This is important information. We'll start with the first few verses.

2 Samuel 23:2-3:

"The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. 3 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,

Here at the beginning, we want to notice David's orientation toward God. He describes God in three different ways: the Spirit of the LORD, the God of Israel, and the Rock of Israel. He says that the Spirit of God is speaking through him. He talks about ruling in the fear of God.

Do you remember what David said the first time that we saw him act in public? He was astonished that Goliath could badmouth the God of Israel and no one would take action. Do you remember what happened when David had the opportunity to kill Saul, the previous king who was chasing him to destroy him? David wouldn't kill the LORD's anointed. Remember also what David did as he brought the ark of God back to Jerusalem to establish his headquarters there. He wasn't afraid of God. He abandoned himself before God, dancing with all his might and earning the scorn of this wife.

David has demonstrated an incredible faith in some of his finest moments throughout his life. He's defended the name of God. He has worshipped God. He has repented before God. He has begged for help for his people. He has honored God. David's life has been inextricably tied to the God of Israel.

So, before we think about anything that David actually did in leadership, we realize that every good thing he did was grounded in his relationship with God. A good leader connects with God.

Great leadership doesn't begin with the people you lead. It doesn't even begin with you. Great leadership has to begin with a connection to God. And this isn't just true for church leadership or religious leadership. Any great leader begins by connecting with God.

You may tell me that there have been many great leaders in the world who didn't have a connection to God. I would argue that there have been effective leaders in the world who aren't connected to God. But true greatness in leadership isn't just about whether you accomplish your goals. True greatness has to do with the kinds of goals that you're accomplishing and the kind of person you're becoming.

If you're not connected to God, how do you evaluate your leadership? You can look down at the people you're leading. You can look within at yourself. You can look outward as the results of your efforts. But none of those views really gives an accurate point of comparison.

It's like you're driving on the highway and trying to compare yourself to all the other cars. It's hard to tell how fast you're going. A little faster than that guy. A little slower than the other one. It's not until you look at a tree that you're passing or a building on the side of the road that you can really judge your speed.

Apart from being connected to God, you are always measuring yourself by your changing context rather than from a fixed point. Parents measure themselves by the behavior of their children. Professionals measure themselves by their career advancement. Politicians by their approval rating, executives by their balance sheets, and pastors by the size of their churches.

But when you are connected to God, you have the freedom to lead in ways that don't depend on those external factors. You don't ignore them. But you aren't controlled them. You lead, as David says, "in the fear of God", not in the fear of men. You aren't controlled by other people or by circumstances. Your first responsibility is to God.

Now read what happens when a leader is connected to God. Verses 4-5 continue in describing this leader.

2 Samuel 23:4-5:

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. 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?

When I was a freshman in college, I had an early morning class. At least at the time, I considered it an early morning class. I think it started at 9am. I had a pattern after this class of going and sitting on a bench in the morning sun. Slowly, I would wake up as the sun warmed me. It was an incredible feeling. During those mornings, I started to understand why ancient cultures would worship the sun.

That's what this passage makes me think of. This is the description of how a leader who is connected to God impacts his or her community. "dawns on them like the morning light", "like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning", "like rain that makes grass to sprout."

Notice that all of these phrases describe change. Something happens to make the situation better than it was before. The sun rises in the morning. The rain comes to water what wasn't growing before. A new thing coming that brings life and warmth and growth where those things were absent.

This is the impact that a leader has on his or her community. A good leader begins by being connected to God. But the result is that a good leader brings communal well-being. A good leader heals a community.

Our culture tends to evaluate leaders based on what they accomplish. It's their output that makes them great. But this picture isn't quite what we think of as results. It's not their achievements. It's their effect on the people around them. Their impact on their community.

Think about the leaders that you know. Some of them probably leave a wake of brokenness and hurt and division behind them. But you probably know others who are different. Where they go, people seem to prosper. They leave a wake of health and well-being in the places where they have been. That's the kind of leader that is being described here.

Now think about your own life. What happens to the communities that you are a part of? When you become part of a group, what is the result? Do you bring health and well-being to a community?

Would anyone describe you as "rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth?"

Don't worry if that isn't quite true, because David says that God "will cause to prosper all my help and desire." It's because of his connection to God that prosperity happens.

That means we don't necessarily have to make it happen. Our first priority is to be connected to God ourselves. Then it is God's work to cause our efforts to prosper for the sake of the community. That's really encouraging.

The poem concludes by giving us a contrasting picture of a bad leader.

2 Samuel 23: 6-7:

But worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away, for they cannot be taken with the hand; 7 but the man who touches them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they are utterly consumed with fire."

We've heard before about "worthless men" in the life of David. This word has appeared in several places. We've met several "worthless men."

Nabal, whose wife Abigail had to save him from David was described this way. When David was run out of Jerusalem by his son Absalom, David met a critic named Shimei who falsely accused him of being a worthless man. Most recently, the last uprising against David was led by a guy named Sheba, who was also described as a worthless man.

These are real people. And we probably know some in our own lives. They are like thorns. Anyone who gets near them will be hurt. But in the end, they don't win. They will be consumed with fire.

Bad leaders are like thorns. You can't get rid of them without hurting yourself. But good leaders are like rain that makes grass sprout. They are connected to God, and as a result, the community around them thrives. This is the kind of leader that David was.

Followers who are loyal and kind

After this section of poetry, the chapter changes to describe the people that were part of David's leadership team. These were the famed "mighty men." We start off with heroic stories about some of the most significant members of the team. The chapter ends with a list of the rest.

We'll look at two specific stories that are told in an effort to see what kind of effect David's leadership had on the people around him.

2 Samuel 23: 9-10:

And next to him among the three mighty men was Eleazar the son of Dodo, son of Ahohi. He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle, and the men of Israel withdrew. 10 He rose and struck down the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clung to the sword. And the Lord brought about a great victory that day, and the men returned after him only to strip the slain.

This man's name was Eleazar. He was one of a group described as "the three" among David's elite soldiers. Eleazar is the second one described. The story that is told of him is a tale of courage and unique bravery. The men of Israel were withdrawing, but not Eleazar. He rose up and kept fighting "until his hand was weary, and his hand clung to the sword."

Right after we got married, my wife and I moved into a condominium in Sunnyvale. We decided to install laminate flooring to replace the carpet and thought we would do it ourselves. So, we went about the task of ripping up the old floor. In the kitchen, there was plywood glued down to a concrete subfloor. We spent most of one day with pry bars, jamming them into the plywood to pull it up.

That night as I was falling asleep, I kept making that motion in my bed. Every time I'd drift off, my arms would spasm like I had been doing all day. That's what happened to Eleazar. He had fought for so long that he couldn't ungrasp his sword.

That's loyalty. Devotion. Eleazar was loyal to David when others had retreated. He kept fighting. Even when he couldn't feel his hand anymore.

A good leader inspires loyalty among others.

In 2011 Psychology Today published an article titled, "Is Loyalty Dead?"¹ That year, researchers concluded that 46% of new hires would leave their company within a year.² As a culture, we don't value loyalty much anymore. But great leaders are different. There is a personal loyalty that develops. A willingness to stay in it for the long haul. A unique connection.

How do you inspire loyalty? I think you do it by being loyal. Loyalty breeds loyalty. The people that David collected weren't exactly the cream of the crop. These were the outsiders of Saul's kingdom. They were criminals and debtors and disgruntled people.

But David took them in and led them. He was loyal to them. He fought for them and for their families. And they were loyal to him in return. Loyalty is a reciprocal kind of quality. It develops between two people in equal measure.

Good leaders inspire loyalty. But great leaders inspire something more. You can create loyalty with rewards and compensation and programs. But the next story paints a picture of something that develops with a truly exceptional leader. It's far deeper than loyalty.

2 Samuel 23:13-17:

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. 14 David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. 15 And David said longingly, "Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" 16 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 17 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.

This scene took place very early on, when David was running from Saul. This group of men had very recently collected around him. David's comment about the water from Bethlehem was a moment of nostalgia. A yearning for his hometown. Those were simpler days when he hadn't been anointed king and wasn't being hunted down by the current king.

Three of his men want to give him that moment of simplicity. We don't know if it was "The Three." I think it could have been any three. The ambiguity makes us think that any of David's men could have acted this way.

They want to surprise their leader with an extravagant gift. They want to go over-the-top and give something to David that was incredibly valuable.

Why would they want to do this? This isn't loyalty. This is something else. This is far more than loyalty.

This is kindness. The desire not just to be loyal, but to show affection. Personal attachment. Even love. A good leader doesn't just inspire loyalty. A good leader inspires kindness.

The funny thing about kindness is that sometimes it can be really hard to receive.

Do you ever get uncomfortable receiving gifts? Maybe you don't like the attention focused on you. Maybe you are more used to giving gifts and taking care of people than you are on actually receiving something from someone else. That's true for many people I know.

During one of my last weeks as pastor of the Young Adult ministry, a strange thing happened during the worship set. People started getting up and leaving. First one by one. Then two at a time. Finally, there were only a few people left in the room. I knew something was up, but I had no idea what.

When it was time for me to start teaching someone made an excuse about going to another room. So we all wandered around until we arrived at the Fellowship Hall. There, a big crowd had gathered for a surprise party. They knew me well enough to make it an ice cream party. It was really meaningful to me.

At one point they asked me to say something. And a weird thing happened: I didn't know what to say. All I could say was "thank you." I couldn't put into words the love that I had developed for all these people I had ministered to and with. I couldn't say how meaningful it was to be their pastor. I'm not normally made uncomfortable by attention. I'm not usually at a loss for something to say. But I didn't know what to do with the kindness of these people that meant so much to me.

David did a strange thing in response to the kindness from his men. At first, refusing to drink this water and pouring it out might confuse us or even upset us. But notice what the text says, "He poured it out to the LORD." The word used there is a very specific word for "pour." It's always used in reference to a drink offering given to God.

David isn't rejecting their gift. He takes their kindness and transforms it into a drink offering to the LORD. He makes it eternal. He honors their kindness more than just by accepting it. David received the loyalty of his men and he received their kindness. He had an incredible relationship with them.

Are you able to receive loyalty and kindness? Are you able to let someone else express that to you? You might wish people were more loyal or more kind. But maybe they've tried to be. Have you accepted it?

Instead of thinking about how to inspire more loyalty or kindness, look for the ways that the people in your life are already treating you that way. Who in your life is loyal to you? Who in your life is kind? Can you receive it? Maybe those are the people that you're actually having an influence upon.

David was connected to God. His actions resulted in the well-being of his community. His people were loyal to him. But more than that, they looked for ways to express kindness. David was loved as a leader.

Is this the kind of leader you aspire to be?

Final Warning

Just as our poem ended with the contrast of a bad leader, the list of David's men ends with a warning. Starting in verse 24, the author stops telling stories about each and every member of David's elite squad. He starts just listing their names.

We won't read all of their names, but we'll start toward the end and read a few. It's the last name that we're interested in.

2 Samuel 23:37-39:

Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai of Beeroth, the armor-bearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah, 38 Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, 39 Uriah the Hittite: thirty-seven in all.

There it is. Right at the end. This chapter contains the names of all of David's elite warriors. There were thirty seven of them in total. But right at the end is a name that we are all too familiar with. Uriah the Hittite.

Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. Uriah, whose wife David violated and made pregnant. Uriah, who carried his own murder instructions back to his general. Uriah, who died on the battlefield because David wouldn't face his own mistake.

Uriah was one of David's mighty men. It's no accident that his name is listed right at the end here. It's not a coincidence.

This morning we've been talking about the leadership lessons that we can learn from David. I've praised David as a great leader. We've asked how we can follow his example. But we need to be reminded as well of the danger of great leadership. Leaders need to be connected to God. They need to have the health of the community in mind. They inspire loyalty and kindness. But great leaders also need to remember how things can go sour. Great leaders need a warning.

I read a book in seminary called *The Dark Side of Leadership*. It pointed out that many of the things that can make a leader great also have the potential to bring out his or her dark side. We need to remember that all of us have a dark side. Any place where we can exercise influence is a place where we can abuse our leadership.

People sometimes say that power changes people. There's the famous quote by Lord Acton, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."³

But I don't think Lord Acton got it right. Power doesn't change us. Leadership doesn't make us into different people. It just puts us into a position to act on the temptations that are already there. We are already corrupted people. In fact, some of the very things that make us into good leaders also give us the possibility of hurting others.

We've seen the dark side of David. I think we saw hints of it from the very beginning. At the end, we saw it come out in devastating ways. But the potential was always there. Right here, at the end of this list of people who showed David loyalty and kindness, we are meant to remember. We are meant to remember that David was not just a great leader. He was also a leader who abused his power.

We could easily do the same. We have the same potential. It is within us even now. We will be tempted to use people whom we are supposed to serve. We will be tempted to ignore the needs of others to meet our own. We will be tempted to cover up our mistakes, sometimes in drastic ways.

We need this warning. We need people who aren't afraid to tell us that things aren't quite right. We need loyalty and kindness. But we also need honesty and confrontation and humility. We need to remember our dark side.

Conclusion

We need to do more than just remember. We can learn a lot about leadership from working on a 20th century lumber boat. We can learn a lot about leadership from watching a guy like David. We can learn from the people in our lives and grow from our experiences.

But there is only one thing that can protect us and the people around us from the dark side of leadership. There is only one way to deal with the fact that as leaders, as parents, as children, as friends, and as coworkers, we will hurt the people around us. Our mistakes will cause others pain.

The only solution is the one that David found when he came before God in repentance. That solution is available to us but in much fuller detail. We know the perfect leader, who came as the son of David. He was connected to God. His work was all about bringing the health of the community around him. He developed people who, after a few times of running away and denying that they ever knew him, turned incredibly loyal to him. Even willing to die for him.

Finally, he inspired not just loyalty, but kindness. Once, a woman washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Another time a man risked death to protect him. Still another time, a prominent leader risked persecution to take care of his body when he died.

If you're going to be a leader like David, you need to know the son of David. You need to know Jesus. And not just that, but you need to follow Jesus. You can't be a great leader if you aren't a follower of Jesus.

I was having lunch with someone a few months ago who was describing a career transition. He was being considered for a position of leadership. He told me that other roles hadn't worked out very well. He concluded that "I'm not a great follower of others. I think I'm more effective as a leader." Immediately, I knew that he was headed for a train wreck. You can't lead if you can't follow.

You especially can't lead if you can't follow Jesus. If you aren't a follower of Jesus, but you'd like to know more about how he can help you deal with your dark

side, come talk to one of us after the service. We'd love to help you in that process. If you are a follower of Jesus, know that he is the one who allows you to lead.

If you want to be a great leader, become a loyal follower. Follow Jesus, the son of David, the greatest leader the world has ever known.

Endnotes

- ¹ Williams, Ray. *Is Loyalty Dead?* Psychology Today, 4 July 2011. Web. 26 May 2016. <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/201107/is-loyalty-dead>>
- ²Deutschendorf, Harvey . *7 Habits of Leaders Who Inspire Loyalty*, Fast Company, 2 Dec. 2015. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/3054067/know-it-all/7-habits-of-leaders-who-inspire-loyalty>>
- ³ "Lord Acton Quotes." *Brainy Quotes*. n.p. Web. n.d.