

King David and Loyalty (1)

The very survival of the church and the family depends on the quality of loyalty. Character traits matter. Values matter. Integrity matters. Keeping commitments matter. Our nation is being destroyed because of corruption which is no less than a focus on what makes me happy. Greed is one of the symptoms. Sacrifice for a higher calling is rare. When we see it we know it. Thankfully we can still give some momentary celebration of it, like when firemen rush into burning buildings or soldiers come home from war. "All for one and one for all" is not totally dead in America or in the church. But, it is sick, I fear.

I believe that teaching and preaching is one of God's ordained means for breathing new life into his people. In the Valley of Dry Bones, God asked Ezekiel if these bones can live. Ezekiel said, "Lord, you know." The Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. Preach to them. Motivate them. Persuade them. Warn them. Give them reasons to get up and become an army. (Notice that the bones made alive did not amble off in their own way. They became an army, organized and potent.) So Ezekiel who had little personal hope that his preaching would do any good to such a dry crowd, did as God commanded. The results were amazing.

Since I cannot gather a crowd daily to preach, I can send out messages for you to read. There are stories in the Bible that help me stay fired up. I thought of some stories in David's life that speaks directly to the trait of loyalty. I realize that there were times David was not loyal. Probably one of the worse stories in the Bible depicting disloyalty is found in 2 Samuel 11-12. David stole Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. He had sex with her and impregnated her. He tried to cover it up by inviting Uriah, one of his faithful and loyal soldiers, to come home to be with his wife. However, the loyalty of Uriah is amazing. He refuses to have sexual relations with his own wife while his fellow soldiers are fighting in Ammon. He camps out on the steps of the king's palace with his wife a stone's throw away. What loyalty and devotion to one's own men!

In an act of extreme disloyalty David sent Uriah back to the front, instructing his commander Joab to place Uriah in the front of the battle, wait till the battle was most fierce, and then draw the troops back leaving Uriah exposed. Of course, the outcome was fatal. Uriah died in battle and David took Bathsheba as his wife. It was not until Nathan confronted him with the story of the man with the pet lamb (see 1 Sam. 12) that David realized what he had done. How could David have been so blind to his own actions? The answer is both profound and simple. He wanted what he wanted and did not want to pay for the consequences of his actions. His lust, pride, and ego got in the way of his loyalty to a trusted fellow soldier and friend.

Most acts of disloyalty are not nearly so dramatic and consequential. God even used this act of treachery for good. Read Matthew 1:6. Jesus was brought into the world. God brings loyalty out of disloyalty.

In future articles on David, I want to explore 1) David's loyalty to Saul; 2) David's loyalty to Jonathan and his family; 3) and David's loyal relationship to his mighty men. I believe we can learn something important from these stories.

Rod Myers
August 3, 2009

King David and Loyalty (2)

King David drew his military commander and his entire army into his disloyalty to Uriah. This was every bit as despicable as his adultery with Bathsheba, an act of disloyalty to Michal and Abigail, his two wives. Disloyalty contaminates many.

But, David also had incredible experiences of loyalty. One of the most amazing tales is his relationship to King Saul, his father-in-law. You remember that after David's victory over Goliath, the Philistine (1 Samuel 17), David was celebrated in Israel as a hero. The people sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). This caused Saul to be extremely jealous. This jealousy was accompanied by an evil spirit that prompted Saul to try to kill David (18:10-11). But because of Saul's fear of David he made him a commander and his son-in-law (18:12-18). Saul was a disturbed man. He obsessed over killing David. This began a chase that lasted several years.

From place to place Saul pursued David. The stories of this pursuit can be read in 1 Samuel 19-31. The amazing thing is how loyal David remained to this evil and disturbed king. God was clearly not on Saul's side. Saul had been blatantly disobedient to God and was condemned by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 13, 15). Saul was rejected as king and David was anointed by Samuel at God's direction to be the new king (1 Samuel 15, 16). Get the picture. Saul was mentally disturbed having an evil spirit, was disobedient to God's commands, was condemned by God's prophet, was rejected as king, and was replaced by David. Yet, David was still amazingly loyal to Saul because he had been anointed by God.

Look at what David did to prove his loyalty. First, when Saul was being disturbed by the evil spirit, David would come play his harp to soothe him (1 Samuel 16:14ff). Second, David came to Saul's aid in the battle against the Philistines and slew the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Third, even when Saul tried to kill David, David did not retaliate, even becoming a hunted man, leaving his home and family to hide in caves or in foreign lands among his enemies. He even had to find safe haven for his father and mother in Moab (1 Samuel 22:1ff).

There are two very notable events in this story that shows David's intense loyalty to Saul and to God. The first is found in 1 Samuel 24. David was dwelling in the Crag of the Wild Goats in the Desert of En Gedi. When Saul learned of this he took 3000 men to capture or kill him. Saul stopped off and entered a cave "to relieve himself" (24:3), not knowing that David and his men were in the back of the cave. On the encouragement of his men and unknown to Saul, David crept up on Saul, took his knife, and cut off a corner of his robe. What happened next is incredible.

"Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is anointed of the Lord.' With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way." (24:5-7) After that the story continues with David calling out to Saul, bowing down to him, and letting him know what he had done in the cave. One of the points David made to Saul was this: "Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion" (24:11) Incredible! David was willing to leave all judgment to God alone who had anointed Saul as king.

The second story is found in 1 Samuel 26. Again Saul gets a tip that David is in the Desert of Ziph. He rounds up his 3000 men (doesn't this sound a little excessive?) and pursues David. While Saul sleeps (God have them a holy sedative) surrounded by his army David and two of his men sneak into the camp, and steal Saul's spear and water jug. Once they are a safe distance away David calls out the commander of Saul's army, Abner, and engages in a little "trash talk." "You're a man, aren't you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn't you guard your lord and king. What you have done is not good. As surely as the Lord

lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the Lord's anointed. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?" (26:15-16)

David again got near enough to kill Saul, but instead spared his life because he was not to kill the Lord's anointed. Reading the rest of the story we learned that Saul was humbled by this act of loyalty. Saul knew the loyalty was a one way street.

But the story takes one more amazing turn. In chapter 31 Saul fell on his own sword and died. He was clearly dead. However, the young man who brought David the report of Saul's death told another story. He said he found Saul still alive after he had fallen on his sword. He told David that Saul asked him to assist him in his death. The young man claims he did so, possibly thinking he would be a hero to David for killing his mortal enemy. David's answer surprised him: "Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" At this David had the man executed for killing Saul. Then David weeps over Saul and Jonathan's deaths.

What does this tell us about loyalty? The message I get is that I am not always responsible for the faithfulness of others. I do not have to agree with everyone. I do not have to endorse their actions. But, if they are truly anointed by the Lord, then they are the Lord's servant and not mine. I must be faithful to them. David told Saul the truth. David accepted his role as Saul's replacement. He continued to fight Saul's enemies. But, he would not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed.

In the New Testament we are told that each Christian has an anointing from the Lord (1 John 2:20, 26-27). Each of us is the Lord's anointed. The same kind of loyalty David showed Saul, is the kind we must show one another in Christ. I John is filled with admonitions about how we are to treat one another. The key word in this is love, which "bears all things" (1 Cor.13:7). May we learn the lessons of the past.

Rod Myers
August 4, 2009

King David and Loyalty (3)

The relationship between David and Jonathan, Saul's son, is famous. They were brothers-in-law. Our first introduction to Jonathan was in 1 Samuel 19 when Saul told him and his attendants to kill David. Jonathan was being recruited by his father as a "hit man." Instead of fulfilling his father's desires, Jonathan became David's informant. The text says, "But Jonathan was very fond of David" (19:1). This led to his warning David about the dangers he faced.

Friends warn each other about dangers. This is a great part of loyalty. We do not want to see anyone get hurt. We desire to protect our friends. The method he chose at first was to try to persuade his father that David was a good guy. He reminded his father of the great things David had done, especially his defeat of the Philistine enemies. Saul seemed to be persuaded and promised on oath not to kill David. But when the evil spirit returned he forgot his oath, hurling a spear at David, narrowly missing him (19:9-10).

David's wife Michal, Jonathan's sister, also was involved in protecting David (19:11-17), although she lied to her father making it seem that David had threatened to kill her if she did not protect him.

We find David and Jonathan together in 1 Samuel 20. In this scene David is convinced that Saul is still determined to kill him, though Jonathan is not in agreement yet. So they devise a plan to find out the truth. Jonathan's devotion to David is still clear. He says, "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?" (20:9) In this event came one of the most beautiful oaths of friendship within the Bible. Here is how it went:

¹² Then Jonathan said to David: "By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know?" ¹³ But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, ¹⁵ and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family-not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

¹⁶ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account."

¹⁷ And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

This vow undertaken by David, requested by Jonathan, is one of the greatest illustrations of loyalty, and what that means, in Scripture. Notice the features of this loyalty. **First**, Jonathan promised to risk his own life for David's by finding out information from his father. **Second**, Jonathan promised not to leave his friend in this matter, regardless of Saul's disposition and intent. He even invoked a curse on himself if he failed to stand by his friend. **Third**, he made it clear that whatever the outcome, he only wanted what was best for his friend, God's favor on him. **Fourth**, Jonathan wanted some assurance that he would be rewarded for his loyalty to David, i.e. that David would not turn on him to kill him, in order to secure the kingdom. In this Jonathan was saying that he was no risk to David, that he would not seek the throne if his father died, and that he would pledge allegiance to David as king. **Fifth**, all of this was based on love, not mere politics.

The story continues in 1 Samuel 20 with Saul's anger burning against his son Jonathan to such an extent that he tried to kill him (good thing Saul wasn't a very good shot with a spear). Jonathan was "grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David." (20:34) Jonathan went on to warn David again, and their meeting ended with Jonathan speaking these words to David: "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" (20:42)

In 1 Samuel 31, we learn that Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle, and David laments them in 2 Samuel 1:17ff. Time does not permit to "unpack" David's gracious words about them, but take some time to read them. One thing David did say of Jonathan is "I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2 Samuel 1:26).

The story does not end here. In 2 Samuel 4:4 we learn that Jonathan had a son who was lame in both feet, and accident caused by a nurse who fell as they were fleeing. He was five when his father and grandfather died. His name was Mephibosheth. In 2 Samuel 9 David asked this important question: "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" A servant named Ziba informed David of Jonathan's son. David fulfilled his vow to Jonathan with these words to Mephibosheth: "Don't be afraid for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table." (9:7) The loyalty of David to Jonathan even in death was beautiful.

So what is the point for us? Quality of life within the body of Christ depends on the loyalty of the members of that body to one another. We explicitly and implicitly make vows to each other within the local church. We enter into "covenants" (witnessed by rocks). We sing songs that express our loyalty to one another ("How Sweet, How Heavenly is the Sight"). We express our friendship and love for one another. We take on financial commitments together. We choose leaders together. We make plans together. We volunteer for tasks. We accept responsibilities. In all these actions, we are saying that we will be loyal to one another.

These vows and commitments are often taken lightly. It is amazing to me what we think releases us from such commitments! We need to check ourselves on how we rationalize our way out of responsibilities to others. David had a very good reason not to be friends with Jonathan and his family. It was not politically correct. It was dangerous for him. The morale and loyalty of his army was involved. This friendship could be interpreted as weakness. (Take some time to look at David loyalty to his son Absalom that had similar consequences, 2 Samuel 13-18.) But, in spite of all the reasons not to be faithful to his friend, David was loyal, setting us an example.

Rod Myers, August 10, 2009

King David and Loyalty (4)

Another fascinating aspect of David's life was his relationship to his "mighty men." Early on in David's conflict with Saul there is a brief mention of those who became David's men. In 1 Samuel 22:2 we learn: "All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him." What a way to raise an army! Our imaginations could run wild with thoughts of who these men were. We might say they were the losers of society. They were looking for a place to belong, and they found it in service to King David. They became his "mighty men."

Throughout David's exploits we keep hearing of "David and his men." Was this David's church? He spent years running from the "law" with these men. They had their "stronghold" (1 Sam.24:22), a place of refuge and security-their hangout. To borrow a phrase from Eldridge's Wild at Heart, they were a "band of brothers."

History and myth is filled with "bands of brothers." There is King Arthur's Knights of the Roundtable. There was Robin Hood's Merry Men. Armies have their platoons. Firefighters have their station buddies. Sailors have their shipmates. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid had their "Hole in the Wall" gang.

I love the show, The Unit. The Unit includes Jonas, Colonel Tom Ryan, Mack Gerhardt, Charles Grey, Hector Williams and Bob Brown, all highly skilled, trustworthy, brave and dependable soldiers (Special Forces) whose ability to rely on each other is what creates their brotherhood. Jonas' wife, Molly, is the base matriarch who comforts and counsels the other wives as they cope with the fear and uncertainty they experience when their husbands leave home. There is something in the heart of men that longs to be a part of such a gang.

There is a phenomenon around the world that we refer to as gangs. Most gangs are considered lawless and exceedingly dangerous. Every country has gangs. Most prisons have gangs. Most schools have gangs (or social clubs). The website "How Things Work" describes how gangs work and why people join gangs. They give four points: 1) Poverty; 2) Peer Pressure; 3) Boredom; 4) Despair. Under the heading of "despair" we find this statement: "A neighborhood gang can seem like the only real family they'll ever have. Joining a gang gives them a sense of belonging and being a part of something important that they can't get otherwise."

We seem to keep returning to his idea of a sense of belonging. God wired people to belong. He provided family, church, and nations (communities) to fulfill this longing. When people have experienced being ripped apart or unfulfilled in family, church, and communities they become perpetually discontented, lonely, and isolated. Trust is harmed. We simply learn to be cautious in our allegiance to others. This changes our spiritual and psychological DNA. Our Father sent Jesus to redeem us from all this, and to restore us to harmony within family, church, and communities.

David's mighty men were amazing. In 2 Samuel 23:8ff we get some insight into what that rag-tag team of social rejects became under David's leadership. Josheb-Basshebeth killed 800 men with a spear in one encounter. Eleazar of Dodai struck down Philistines until his hand froze his sword. (My hand cramps up and freezes to my guitar neck sometimes when I play too long. Does that mean I am a "mighty man?") But, the story I like the most is the one of intense loyalty expressed toward their commander, David.

David was in the cave of Adullam, his stronghold. The Philistines were encamped near his hometown of Bethlehem. He was remembering his home, and spoke these words: "Oh, that someone would get me a

drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" Don't we all long to return to a place of our youth, where the water was sweeter and the air was clearer, and our troubles were less severe. No sooner had David uttered these words that the three top mighty men set out, fought their way through the Philistine lines, drew the water from the well, fought their way back through the battle lines, and presented the water to David. I have forever been conflicted by what David did. But, I am convinced that he was overwhelmed by their loyalty to him. The text says, "But he refused to drink it; instead he poured it out before the Lord." (23:16b) "Far be it from me, O Lord, to do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" (23:17)

David valued this water so greatly that he could not drink it. Instead he offered it as a "drink offering" to the Lord because it was water secured at the risk of the lives of his faithful men. He knew he was not worthy of such loyalty. He knew he did not deserve it. Who does deserve loyalty? It is a gift we give one another. It is like grace. It is worthy only to be offered up to the Lord as a sacrifice. (Compare Phil.2:14-18.)

Oh for brothers and sisters in our lives who would risk themselves for us! Where are the mighty men and women today who would sacrifice themselves for their friends? The family and the local church are starving for this kind of devotion. Just as the Marines never have a recruiting problem, I believe the church would never have a growth problem if the world could see that the members of a local church have this kind of loyalty to one another. People want a place to belong. But they want to belong to a group that they know they can trust, people who will not let them down, and people who they can commit their lives to. But, what do they see? In the church they see people who are all about their personal preferences, their own convenience, their own likes and dislikes, and their own comfort. They see people who would just as soon leave and go to another church as they would change the brand of their soft drink (actually some are more loyal to their soft drink than they are to their local church).

David was fortunate. He was able to live his life among men who were willing to die for him. Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends. As Clay says, "Someone should have written that down."

Rod Myers, August 10, 2009