UBF Message 04/18/2021

David’s integrity (What would you do with your power?)

1Sam 24 key verse 6

He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.”

What would you do with money when you hit the jackpot? What would you do with power when you become a principle in school or chair in your department?

David was anointed as king in chapter 16, was approved in battle in chapter 17, and was waiting for the inauguration of his kingship. But he had to flee for his life from Saul from chapter 20. Saul’s pursuit drove David to desperate measures, such as eating the forbidden shewbread at Nob and feigning insanity at Gath in chapter 21. David fled for his life from Adullam to Keilah in chapters 22 and 23. In the previous chapter, chapter 23, Saul almost caught David in the desert of Maon. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land.” Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines.

David fled for his life from Saul. But in chapter 24, the tables were turned. David, for the first time, had the power to kill Saul who was in a very vulnerable situation. He got the best chance to avenge himself against Saul. But David did not kill him. Here we see David’s integrity. When a person has power, their true colors are revealed; they either use it properly or abuse it terribly. When David had the power to kill Saul, he did not use it to kill but to respect Saul. In fact, in chapters 24-26 David had power to kill Saul, Nabal, and again Saul. Each time David was tempted to kill them. However, he did not abuse his power. David did not take matters into his hands but trusted in God that God might bring justice in his own time.

In this passage we will learn David’s integrity: how he used his power to honor rather than kill God’s anointed. His integrity comes from his fear of God. His fear of God taught him to honor the king, and also become an honorable king, himself. In the end David trusted in God who would bring justice in his situation. Integrity is a code of honor, kingdom ethics and the character of royalty. David needed integrity as a king for his future kingship. So, we will think about three aspects of David’s integrity: his fear of God, his honor for the king, and his trust in God.

First, David feared God (1-7)

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats. Saul came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself, having bowel movement. His armies were outside the cave. But David and his men were far back inside the cave. All of sudden, Saul was placed in a very vulnerable situation. Before, Saul had had power over David. But now, David had power over Saul. He got the best chance to avenge himself against his enemy. David’s men said in verse 4, “This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.” David listened to his men and crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.

However, David felt terrible and guilty about his actions. Verse 5 says, “Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.” Why? It is because he feared God. He said to his men in verse 6, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.’” When David cut off a corner of the king’s robe, his conscience spoke to him, “This is wrong.” Our conscience is like a spiritual sensor that senses right and wrong. When we do wrong, our consciences tell us right away, “This is wrong.” Our conscience is based on the moral code built in our hearts. Through parents, education, and Scripture, our consciences are formed in our hearts. When we fear God, we have a good conscience. When we fear the Word of God, we can keep our conscience clean. Here David’s men were not conscience stricken because they did not fear God. However, David’s conscience was stricken because he feared God. His fear of God controlled his behavior. As Solomon said in Proverbs 9:10a, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” When we fear God, God gives us wisdom how to handle a situation. When David feared God, he knew what to do. David knew that God did not want him to kill Saul, even cutting off a corner of his robe, because Saul was chosen by God and anointed as a king. David knew that it was not his job but God’s job to judge Saul since God is the one who chose and anointed Saul. David knew that he would be in trouble if he killed Saul and crossed God’s boundary.

His fear of God produced the honor of a king. David said three times in verses 6 and 10 that King Saul was the LORD’s anointed. Because of this, he honored King Saul regardless of his lack of integrity. David respected his kingship despite Saul’s sinful character flaws. That is why David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. This leads us to the second part.

Second, David honored the king (8-11)

Saul left the cave and went his way. Then David came out of the cave and called out to Saul. he said in verse 8, “My lord the king! When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.” David called Saul, “My lord the king,” and paid homage to the king as his lord.

How could David honor Saul when he tried to kill him? David could respect Saul because he feared and honored God. His fear of God resulted in the honor of a king. Fear of God comes first, then the honor of a king next. That is why he said in verse 10, “This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD’s anointed.’” Honoring the king means honoring his position and his kingship. Honoring the king means acknowledging the power and position that a king receives from God. Honoring the king ultimately means honoring God and His action. It is acknowledging God’s sovereignty.

Then, David changed his tone. Verse 11 says, “See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.” David spoke more intimately, calling Saul his father. In fact, Saul was his father-in law. Saul used to love David when he played harp for him. As a son, David appealed to his father-in law by stating his innocence and lack of ill intention. Then David spoke about God’s justice.

Third, David trusted God (12-22)

David continued to speak to Saul in verse 12, “May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.” In this verse we find that David trusted God as the Judge. Humanly speaking, it would be very easy for David to take matters into his own hands by killing Saul in the cave. His men encouraged him to do so by saying that God had granted the opportunity. David would no longer have to be a fugitive. Why waste this perfect chance? However, David did not take matters into his own hands. David believed that judgment belonged to God because the LORD is the one who anointed Saul as a king. David did not use his power to kill Saul because he trusted that God would bring perfect justice in this matter. David knew where his boundary ends and where God’s boundary begins. Once he killed Saul, he would have crossed his own boundary and entered God’s, acting as God. That is why he said, “my hand will not touch you.” Romans 14:4 states, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” Saul was the LORD servant, not David’s. We should be very careful when we are tempted to judge God’s servant. Judgment belongs to God.

When we read history, it is full of revenge. Since Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, humans have executed their own judgment based on their knowledge of good and evil. Instead of allowing God to judge, people took matters into their own hands and enacted revenge. In other words, humans have acted as God in history, just as the serpent promised that they would be like God, knowing good and evil.

However, David was not a victim of the revenge cycle. If David had killed Saul, Saul’s descendants would have taken revenge on David in the future. And the revenge cycle would continue. But David broke the cycle of revenge by honoring Saul as a king regardless of his evilness. David broke the cycle of revenge by humbly staying within his own boundary as a servant. David broke the cycle of revenge by trusting in God who would judge Saul according to his justice in the future. That is why David said in verse 15, “May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.” When David had power, he handed his power over to God so that God would judge Saul. But when Saul had power over David, he used his power to try to kill David. What a big contrast!

David’s striking act of honor and mercy profoundly affected Saul. So he said in verses 16b and 17, “Is that your voice, David my son? And he wept aloud. You are more righteous than I,” he said. “You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly.” After hearing David’s speech, Saul was moved to tears and he wept aloud in front of three thousand soldiers. He acknowledged that David was more righteous than he was. For the first time, Saul also admitted that David would be king by saying in verse 20, “I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.” Saul asked David to swear that he would not kill off his descendants. David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

David’s fugitive life was God’s training for David. David would be a king. Being a king means that David would have power over people. It would be a very dangerous thing to have power if one does not know how to use power. It is like giving a gun to a little kid. Many people fail to properly use power. So they abuse their power to manipulate people. David would have such power as a king in the future. So becoming a king requires integrity. Without integrity, no one properly uses power. Without integrity, power becomes danger. Integrity is a code of honor. Integrity is kingdom ethics and the character of royalty. God knew David’s inner character. That is why God trained David to have integrity. Because of God’s training in the wilderness, David became the best king in Israel’s history, although he failed several times, taking Bathsheba as his wife and killing her husband Uriah. He would be worse if he had not had training.

However, one of David’s descendant was different. Although he was a king, he did not use his power to manipulate people. Although he had mighty power as a Son of God, he did not use his power to kill all his enemies who crucified him on the cross. Rather he surrendered his power to God the Father and died for his enemies and all humanity. Instead of using his power, he asked God the Father to forgive those who crucified him. Jesus shows what integrity looks like. Jesus reveals kingdom ethics. Jesus shows code of honor, the character of royalty. He is the perfect example how to properly use power.

How can we apply this word to our lives? Someone may say, “I am not a king, so this does not apply to me.” But the Scriptures say that we are a kingly people. 1 Peter 2:9a states, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood.” We are a royal priesthood regardless of what we believe we are. That is what God sees us. Although we may not feel like kingly people, we are growing from princes to kings or princess to queens. As Paul said in 1Cor 6:2-3, we will judge the world as well as angels in the future. Although we do not know exactly how this will be, one thing is clear, that we are royal people. We will be given some degree of power at some point. And for that, we need integrity. We need integrity to properly use power. That is why we face so many difficulties in life. God allows us to face sufferings so that sufferings produce integrity in our hearts. Integrity is a code of honor. David honored God. David honored Saul. David shows us how to fear God and honor the king regardless of sinful character flaws. Paul said in Phil 2:27, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” We need to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of kingdom, whatever happens. The gospel of kingdom requires kingdom integrity. The gospel of kingdom requires a code of honor and the character of royalty. We, as kingdom people, need to conduct ourselves according to kingdom integrity and a code of honor.

On the other hand, we do have power at present. Many of us are parents. We have power and authority over our children. Many of us are teachers. Teachers have power over students. Many of us are nurses and PA’s and NP’s who have power over patients and parents. Many of us will have power as they graduate from college and get a job. When we do not have power, our sinful nature is not as apparent. But when we have power, our sinful nature rises to the surface and manifests. The tone we use and the words we speak change when we have power. We tend to look down on people when we have power. We tend to control people when we have power. We need to learn David’s integrity and code of honor.

How can we honor people who seem not to be honorable? We have to see what David saw when he looked at Saul. Outwardly Saul was a David’s enemy. But inwardly he was God’s anointed. When we look at people, we have to see inside of people, not outside like skin color or social status. What is inside of people? The image of God! In a sense, humans are originally anointed by God with the image of God. Humans are originally God’s anointed as rulers but fell into sin. So the French Christian philosopher Pascal calls human “a fallen king.” Humans are like Saul a fallen king. When we see the image of God in each person just as David saw God’s anointing in Saul, we can honor the person regardless of his or her evilness. That is why Jesus the Son of God honored and respected every single person regardless of their sinfulness. When we see the image of God in each person, we would not use our power to oppress or control or manipulate them. Rather we would use our power to respect, honor, and bless them. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:17 (NIV 1984), “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.” We need to show proper respect to everyone because all humans are created and anointed in the image of God.

So I challenge you this week to ask yourself this, “How do I use the power I received from God? Do I use it to control people? Look down on people? Or respect, honor them and bless them?” I pray that we may learn from David so that we may fear God and trust in Him, honor the king, and respect everyone.