

Leadership in Biblical Perspective
Officer Ordination and Installation
“Leadership as Worship”
II Samuel 23:8–17
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This is a study dealing with those who are called to serve Christ and leading His church, particularly this local church, Briarwood, as it is a part of the Evangel Presbytery which is also a part of the Presbytery Church of America. A local church is guided by elders and the Bible uses various titles for elders. Sometimes they're called stewards, bishops, overseers, shepherds or pastors. There are a variety of titles because of the multi-faceted dynamic of their ministry to be oversee the people, policies, mission and stewardship of the church that Christ has granted to us. In order for elders to stay focused on their spiritual dynamic in life and ministry they are joined by another ordained office that is given the authority to assist them in the areas of mercy, administration and stewardship ministries which is the office of deacon. In the Bible, the local church has a plurality of elders and deacons.

In the eldership there are two kinds of elders. There are teaching elders whose primary focus is the supported work of working hard at preaching, teaching and prayer as they give themselves to their leadership. They are joined with the shepherding or ruling elders together as they serve the Lord. There is no hierarchy among them. Teaching elders are not over the ruling elders for it is the elders of the church who answer to the Chief Shepherd/Elder, Christ, to guide the church according to its constitution which is the Westminster Confession of Faith along with the larger and short catechism. Many times when people hear the vows that these men take think that the Bible should be the constitution of this church and by God's grace may it never be the constitution of this church because a constitution can be amended and we cannot amend the Bible. In fact, the Bible pronounces an anathema among any who would add or subtract to the Word of God. It is an appeal to the Bible whereby any amendments of our constitution, the Book of Church Order, the Westminster Confession of Faith along with the larger and shorter catechism, would take place.

So the congregation is supposed to select from among themselves those whom they sense meet the qualifications and the calling to be an elder and deacon. The existing elders and deacons put them through discipleship training and the Bible says to 'let these first be tested' which is what has been done with those we are ordaining and installing in this service. Some have already been ordained and are returning to the office to be installed and then they will become a part of the session that oversees the congregation and the diaconic that serves the congregation.

Briarwood has just under 4300 members but then we have those that have not joined yet. Today in our society commitments are not easily come by but we want to take good responsibility therefore those as members of this congregation selected the number that you thought would be wise to oversee this congregation and that is the 75 elders who oversee it. They are ordained for life but installed for three year terms. So every year 25 elders will roll into what we call a sabbatical time and either those who had been on sabbatical or new elders will be elected, ordained or installed. We have 120 deacons and the same thing happens with them where ever year 40 of them go off and 40 come on whether they are returning or new ones.

As we deal with this matter of leadership there is always the primacy of the Word of God which is the foundation and the church of Jesus Christ is the buttress and pillar of truth. We are built upon the Word and exist to uphold the Word because it's only by the Word of God that men and women can know the God of the Word as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Those who serve as elder and deacon will be given a charge and so will the congregation but to set it in the foundation of the Word of God let's look at this passage from II Samuel.

Another reason this passage is important to me concerning this is a man who had an extraordinary impact on my life as a Christian, a leader and a pastor was the president of the seminary I attended and that is Dr. Edmond Clowney. In 1980 I heard him preach from this text and it drastically affected me. I have come back to this text on a number of occasions in my life and I'd like to give you some thoughts on it as well. I Samuel focuses a lot on the life and reign of King Saul and II Samuel brings us into the life and reign of David.

I want to set the context to this text in II Samuel. David is about to take over as king. David has kind of been an outlaw under the search process and the warrant 'dead or alive' from King Saul. David has survived that but has not yet been installed as king and is about to be. He is still in kind of the wandering stage out in the wilderness. David had a number of what were called 'strongholds.' It is there that he would find himself. With King Saul and his armies having been dissipated and David who is not yet installed is now calling together an army.

David had his own 'knights of the round table' so to speak. There were three chief men, 30 men and 37 men. These were men who were utterly dependable. Whenever he went into battle these men were always there for him. Right now the Philistines controlled almost everything to the point that David is in a stronghold. They won't be for long for David is going to come after them. The stronghold David is in is the wilderness and he has been there for quite some time. If you've ever heard of Masada it right around this area where David would be at this time. If you've ever been in this shadow area of the desert you are always told to drink plenty of liquids because it is easy to dehydrate, to have a stroke and be overcome by the heat. So let's read what happens here.

II Samuel 23:8–17 says [8] *These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite; he was chief of the three. He wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he killed at one time.*

[9] *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.*

[11] *And next to him was Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the men fled from the Philistines. [12] But he took his stand in the midst of the plot and defended it and struck down the Philistines, and the LORD worked a great victory.*

[13] *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.

Here are the leaders of the renewal and reestablishing of the Kingdom of God under the prophesied rule of one from the tribe of Judah, from the line of his father and his name is David. It is through that royal line through which will come the Messiah, the Christ. He has been delivered from the hand of Saul but now the Philistines, the enemy of God’s people, surround him. He is in the cave.

I’ve been near this cave a number of times. It is in that cave, in the midst of all this heat, that David finds himself and his army is starting to come to him, including these three chief men of the 30 mighty men who were part of the 37. My guess is that David had water. I have tasted the water at Masada and my guess here is that the water is warm, tepid, stale tasting and he can’t help but think back to his hometown, the city of David, Bethlehem. He is probably thinking of the sweet water that’s at the well that’s at the gate, where the elders and judges would sit, but the gate that was now in control by the Philistines as they taunted the people of God and this new King, David.

David just mentions with longing, ‘Oh for some water at the well of the gates.’ I tried to put myself in this situation. I do know you can get thirsty very quickly in this area. I grew up near this park and one of the things I loved about this part was the creek that was running by it. From out of the bank of the creek was a spring. I returned to this area when Briarwood called me to pastor a church in Charlotte, and by that time I had three kids so I took them to this park to show them where their father’s escapades took place. One of the places I took them to which is still there today is the spring at the bank of this creek. I would tell them, ‘You have to drink this water because it’s the sweetest water you’ll ever drink.’ They didn’t seem to think that much of the water like I did but maybe it’s because I was always so thirsty when I drank from it. That spring seemed life invigorating when I was growing up there. David has that longing.

Notice that David doesn’t direct anyone to go get him a drink of water. He is just expressing a longing. He doesn’t even ask for volunteers. Three men show that dynamic that the Bible calls *hesed* – steadfast love. It is a love that is always thinking how the object of that love can be served, even sacrificial. When they hear David’s desire on their own initiative they trek through the wilderness and we don’t know how they got there or how long it took them, but we do know somehow they broke through the garrison and got the water. By the way, getting the water back is steadfast love because if I’m coming back through the wilderness I’m liable to drink it.

I remember a time I was in Israel and a guy that was with me on the bus. We went together to Jacob’s well and for one dollar I bought some water in a bottle. I brought it all the way back up and it’s a long hike to Jacob’s well. I got back up to the bus and the guy said ‘I wished I had had that.’ I gave him mine and got out and went all the way back down and got another one for a dollar and brought it back. When I got back on the bus the guy had pulled the cork out of it and drank the whole thing. It had to be the ugliest water I had seen and I was upset with him for I thought he would take it back to use as holy water or something.

These three men preserved the water for David and carried it all the way back to him. David’s response is such that we are overwhelmed by it and commentators stumble all over themselves as they try to explain his response. Seemingly it is a thoughtless response. Instead of drinking it the Scriptures say he pours it out before the Lord. Then he says ‘How can I drink this? For this represents the very life blood of these men.’ Basically he is saying ‘I don’t deserve to drink it.’

That wouldn't happen for many today in our secular understanding of leadership. In this kind of leadership they would probably say 'Oh thank you but where's the ice?' It would have been assumed that you ought to do this for me. It would have been assumed that I deserve it and by the way, why don't you do more? This wasn't the case with David.

David sensed such steadfast love as undeserved, such servant sacrificial leadership at the very jeopardy of their lives. For him it would be something that would be blasphemous for him to take it but no it's better use is for him to take and worship the Lord with it. He pours it out 'before the Lord' the text says. This is something sacred. This kind of steadfast love, servant-hearted, sacrificial leadership isn't something I deserve but it's something I can bring to God who alone would deserve it. This text is so rich and there is so much to say about it but I don't have the time to say but for my brothers in ministry and leadership you are going to get exposed to that kind of devotion.

We have people in this congregation that absolutely astound me in how their love for Christ is manifested in how they honor and respect leaders in Christ's church. Every church has the naysayers, the critics and the cynics. I have served in three different churches and I am overwhelmed in this congregation how many men and women I see that are like these three mighty men. Never assume that you deserve their steadfast love to the Lord that has been shown to you. And don't think you deserve it because of what you do.

Secondly, we need to be like David and give praise to God who has produced it. This is leadership that is worship. This belongs to the Lord. David realizes this and it not only becomes a statement of 'I don't deserve it' but it becomes an instrument to give praise to God because He alone deserves it for this was done because of Him and for Him and not for exaltation of ourselves. Many times we'll be the beneficiaries of such love and devotion.

Thirdly, we need to see ourselves as the mighty men to serve One greater than David and that is our Savior. All our Savior has to do is indicate to us His longing for His people for His Kingdom. We don't have to wait for a command or be asked to volunteer. What are the longings of my Savior that I'm willing to fight through the garrisons of all of His enemies to obtain it for His glory?

I don't want to descend into melancholy negativism but just for a moment. That is not the case. For some reason we think because we're saved by grace we don't have any call to the steadfast love of Christ. If I'm saved by grace then it's not what I do that saves me. No, not only should we be attuned to His commands but when He says 'be ye holy' because of His steadfast love that has been fueled by His steadfast love for us we ought to pursue holiness, not to be saved for Jesus provides that holiness, but for our Savior.

When He says to abstain from every form of evil then we ought to say 'God, give me that heart. Help me fight through the enemies of this world that would stain my testimony for you.' If the longings of David meant that much to those mighty men then how much should even the longings of our Savior not have to wait for commands. Do you know how much He loves the church that is being entrusted to us? He loved the church so much that He gave Himself for her and His longing for His people is recorded throughout Scripture. Ephesians 5:25 says *[25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* Paul says to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, *[28] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.* We see the longings of our Savior for His church.

When we experience the blessings of others like the three mighty men blessed David and we like David get those blessings, do not think you deserve it and use it for worship. Then let's

be like those three mighty men, so that not only the commands of our Savior but the very longings of our Savior would cause us to march to the gates of hell to honor Him and bring forth a testimony for Him. But remember we like David, have feet of clay but our Savior doesn't.

Let's now look at the end of II Samuel 23. The three chief men are part of 30 mighty men and the 30 are part of a 37. I'm not going to read the census of the 37 men but I do want to point out the very last one that is listed. II Samuel 23:39 says [39] *Uriah the Hittite: thirty-seven in all*. Uriah had a beautiful wife, didn't he? David became infatuated with her. David's palace has been found in our day in Jerusalem. I have stood in the ruins of it and have looked over the side of the hill from it as he did one day. He saw the rooftops and saw the one who was bathing. He lusted for her and took her to himself. When you have sin you either cover it up or fess it up. He is going to cover it up.

David sends a message to Joab, the chief of his army, to send Uriah, one of his mighty men back here because he had a message he wanted to send back through for Uriah to deliver. So David thinks that when Uriah comes back he will go to his wife and be with her so that any consequences that might have happened with David and Uriah's wife could be covered up by Uriah being with her, but not this mighty man. He is in service so he refuses to go to his wife and stays right there at the door for David. Uriah is one of these men with steadfast love and devotion.

David's attempt to cover up his sin is now foiled so he goes to another plan and this time he sends a message through Uriah to captain Joab to make an advance on the enemy by putting Uriah at the front and then for Joab and company to retreat to leave him to what would be a certain death. David becomes a conspirator to the murder of a man who is numbered with men who give this kind of steadfast love to him.

I'm not doing this to belittle David I'm just saying that David was a man of God. He loved God and had a heart for the Lord for God said he had a heart liken unto Me, but David also is a sinner saved by grace. David is also one we can learn from not only in his obedience but in how he dealt with his sin. David is not the one our devotion is focused on nor are any of those who follow David as leaders so all of you as a congregation, show steadfast love to your leaders. You are about to take a vow to do that, but keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, not your leaders.

Thank God for them but remember their feet are made of clay. Thank God for how He uses them. They are going to thank God for you and they're not going to assume what you do you deserve but they are going to take what you do to give praise to God. They should not think they deserve it and you should know that kind of steadfast love is given to them because you are giving it to the Lord who provided them and is working in them.

There will be a Son of David who will come and He won't have to break into Bethlehem for the drink of water. He will be born there to go to a cross to save His people and He is faithful in His steadfast love to the Father. He is faithful in His steadfast love to you. When He is on that cross they will stick Him with a spear and from His side will flow blood and water. It is this One who says to you "I don't demand you go put your life in jeopardy to get water for Me." This is the One who gives His life for you and then says 'Come and drink of Me, a water from which you will never thirst again.'

Elders and deacons, that's the One whom you love with steadfast love to serve His people. Brothers and sisters as you honor leaders, it is because of your honor to the One who sent them in all of the flaws and frailties, your eyes are fixed on Jesus. Here is the One greater than David, the Son of David. This is the One for whom we leave and this is the One to whom

we follow. This is the One who poured Himself out to the praise of the Father to save us that we may drink of living water forever. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father thank You for the moments we could be in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to serve You in Your church and to follow You, to follow You through leaders You provided. God let us manifest our steadfast love to You by our love for them. Father, may these elders and deacons sense and feel Your love from Your people, even as they know the love of Christ for them but may they never think they deserve it and may they always take it to give praise to You and not to themselves. Then Father as leaders may we fight the enemies of God to bring the living water to the people of God. God, while we thank You for all kinds of leaders we recognize that our eyes are fixed on You and our trust is only in Jesus whose steadfast love endures forever, never faltering, so it is in His Name we set aside these elders and deacons and for His glory. It is in His Name we take our vows to affirm them, honor them, respect them and love them, who You provided to lead Your church. Together as one body we now declare our love for You because of Your steadfast love for us, for I pray this in the Name of Jesus, Amen.