

The Heart of David

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon explores the profound spiritual lessons from David's life, emphasizing the conflict between humility and power, and the call to honor God's anointed amidst persecution.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 24:4

Topics: "Trust in God's Sovereignty", "The Heart of David"

Description

Art Katz explores the profound significance of a single moment in David's life, particularly his encounter with Saul in 1 Samuel 24, illustrating the timeless conflict between the humble, God-dependent individual and the powerful, self-reliant authority. He emphasizes that true overcoming may lie in self-sacrifice and obedience to God's will, even in the face of persecution and injustice. Katz draws parallels between David's actions and the plight of the Remnant Church today, urging believers to embody the 'Davidic' character that reflects God's Kingdom. He highlights the importance of honoring God's anointed, regardless of their failures, and the eternal implications of our choices in moments of testing. Ultimately, Katz calls for a Church that demonstrates the wisdom of God through selflessness and trust in divine sovereignty.

Transcript

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How significant can be a single episode in the life of a man. It was so for David at the height of Saul's relentless pursuit of his life as recorded in I Samuel 24. It is not only historical, but typical as it represents two antibodies symbolized and summed up in both David and Saul. As it was from the beginning (Cain and Abel) so will it be till the end of the age as polarities always at enmity with one another. Why is the young stripling always pursued by that one who towers head and shoulders above his brethren? That kingly persona that men tend to celebrate--that political, religious facade--cannot tolerate the life of the seemingly insignificant one, who sees himself as but a flea. It is a timeless, classic conflict and till the end, those who are anointed, regardless of their external unimpressiveness, will be harried and pursued by the inexplicably vexed who cannot abide their very existence! Somehow, these humble ones are not fit to live in their sight whose offense cannot even be identified; for what brings the offended to a boil, is the very

foolishness of what the other is unselfconsciously in God.

That very weakness, that very God-dependency contrasted to those who have in themselves expertise and ability is the very thing that antagonizes. Why was it that the great Church bodies whether Protestant or Catholic could equally not abide the Anabaptist presence in their midst who were concerned only to live peaceably in this present world as islands of apostolic faith and brotherhood? What kind of threat could they have conceivably constituted for these great monoliths that they could not be permitted to live? They were persecuted; they were pursued; they were tied back to back and drowned in rivers and lakes, burned at the stake or ignominiously dumped in dungeons to rot. Why?

Somehow in this we can glimpse the plight of the Remnant Church at the end of the age, because it has been the plight of the true Church from the beginning. For all of the touting of 'The Kingdom Now' as a Church already in its supreme and ultimate overcoming form, the true nature of overcoming may not yet be comprehended. Daniel speaks of the Beast that "shall wear out the saints of the most high" and who "made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" (7:21,25). The book of Revelation compounds the mystery yet more by adding "it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them"(13:7). How mind-boggling to consider that God allows a devastation to come to the Church by the enemy of our souls so as to overcome us!

Death as the Path to Life?

We have perhaps imagined that to "not love our lives unto death" means that we bravely summon a final courage to suck up our bottom lip, withstand all harassment to the end and 'make it'. But what if the overcoming is in the dying? That is, not somehow tenaciously hanging-in and surviving, but dying in such a way that serves the purposes of God in a mystery? It is that mystery that occupies me. Have we not come to an hour that calls for a new sensitivity to the ultimate purposes of God for those of us caught up with our agendas and the seeking of our own immediate solutions? We will suffer irremediable loss unless we see the daily and the immediate thing in the context of the eternal and the ultimate.

Where the Heavens and the Earth Connect

No accident that the ultimate apostle to whom the stewardship of these mysteries was given had also the practical, daily, mundane weight of the Church upon him. The one who contemplated the loftiest vision was the same occupied with the workaday details and to labor as well for his living making tents! Somehow that is quintessentially apostolic. To be occupied with the lofty and eternal without an earthly and present application is to drift into a pseudo-spirituality. If we gave ourselves only to the immediate and the practical, however pressing and right, we would be equally as warped. It is somehow the conjunction of that which is timeless but also set in time that is the very mystery of the apostolic heart of the Church which needs now to be apprehended and walked in.

What has all this to do with the David of I Samuel 24? How could he have had any anticipation for a word 'apostolic' not then extant? Here I think is the beauty of the text for this is that David of whom the greater David is named and to whom the lesser points. There is something 'Davidic' that is sublimely in the heart of God that defines His very Kingdom as the Kingdom of David. And what is the 'genius' of that Kingdom that is so revealed in the person of David that later comes to fullest expression in the Greater? That is the something that ought to occupy us.

The Power of the Immediate to Reveal

In a moment, in a mindless act that we do not have the time to plot or scheme, our best or worst is revealed. When the moment comes that takes us by surprise that could not have been anticipated, that is inadvertent--our response at that moment of unpremeditated reaction is in fact what we are! I believe that what needs to be found in us is what was found in David in such a moment revealing in fact what he was, which God so celebrates and finds beloved.

Pray for the Church, that what David did intuitively, likely without any awareness of the eternal consequence of his choice, we would perform consciously as that which affects the eternal purposes of God. For have we not come to that Kingdom time that anything that happens anywhere affects everything everywhere? and that all our doing must be 'Davidic' in its character as well as in its deed? Is not this the 'manifold wisdom' for whose demonstration to the principalities and the powers God waits? Not to see our lives set in such a context is simply not to see and nullifies ourselves as being that Church--the key and agent in that condition of Israel's final Restoration.

The 'Bleeding Heart' vs. The Heart of God

What then is this "wisdom"? Let us examine it as reflected in the conduct of David in the supreme moment that came to him in his flight from Saul. Saul, we must remember, was the one who could not bring himself to the total obedience required by Samuel to "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (I Samuel 15:3). He could not bring himself to the totality of that obedience but spared the best of the sheep and the oxen as a 'sacrifice' as unto the Lord. Yet, not long after this, the same Saul, without hesitation, ruthlessly exterminates the entire priestly community at Nob because it had befriended and succored David! This is very instructive. Do not think for a moment that the 'bleeding-heart' environmentalists who palpitate for whales and endangered species will for a moment hesitate to spare us when we will not sympathize with their one-world order in a coming hour. So relentlessly and implacably will the enemy of our souls pursue us through the 'Sauls' of our age.

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheep-folds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. (I Sam. 24:2-3)

This of course provided David with a remarkable once-and-for-all opportunity to deliver himself of his tormentor. Every logic of self-survival would have justified it. Indeed, even a 'prophetic word' had evidently come that promised a divinely given occasion for it:

"Behold, this is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" (I Sam. 24:4)

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly. And it came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. (I Sam. 24:4-5)

What kind of man is this? I don't know that we can even understand it. We are products of another age that defaces public buildings with its graffiti, defiles its streets with its litter, desecrates with its profanity. We do not know what this kind of honoring and respect is. Our consciences are not that sensitive as our disrespect even for each other demonstrates. I have myself been guilty of more damage in the name of

'truth' then others have performed in error! How much and how often have we 'called the fire down' on other ministries let alone denominations and religious institutions we thought opposed to the faith? Yet David was pricked in his conscience merely to cut the apostate king's robe!

The Foundation of Kingdom Authority

"Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed." (1 Sam 24:6)

In a word, it doesn't matter what his track record is. It doesn't matter how he has failed. The anointing is so precious that even when the meaning has been forfeited for which it has been given, a respect for the office and the person is a respect and an honoring of the God who has conferred it. What would the history of the Church have been with Israel, though backslidden and apostate? What would it be today--if this had been its attitude? What would our generation be like today if we, as children, had had such an attitude toward our parents? What is it presently like and rapidly becoming for the want of the same?

I had boasted as an atheist once when told to "Honor your father and your mother" that they did not "deserve" it--as if honor were relative to performance! Now I know that there is something inherent, given by God regardless of performance that commends honoring. Our ability to comprehend this, contrary to the spirit of our age, will affect not only our longevity but our ability to represent the Kingdom so as to establish it.

Saul got up from the cave and went on his way. And what was his way? The way of a murderer. The way of an implacable man bent on the destruction of that which he sees as threat to his kingdom. To allow this man to go on is to invite one's own death. This was no little passing amenity that David could afford, for it was not only his physical life at stake but his whole calling and the very kingdom that was contingent upon it. Indeed, the whole Messianic lineage that was to issue in the Christ was at stake! Certainly, if a man wants to be magnanimous about his own life he may--but what of the importance of the ministry that is joined to it?.

David's deference to Saul is contrary to the wisdom of this age--the wisdom by which the world lives its life, the wisdom that 'takes care of number one' by doing what ever is expedient to assure it, that will "stretch forth its hand" even violently, in the last analysis, to do so. Have we not even as ministers of the Gospel employed the violence of divorce in the name of and the protection and preservation of our 'ministries'? How few have faulted us for so doing and with what scant interruption do we continue with a new and more amenable (and more attractive?) spouse our important service? The Church hardly takes note and the momentary disruption is soon forgotten as the ministry is enjoyed now by even larger numbers.

How mindless are we that we are locked in a cosmic moral drama between two wisdoms. The issue, as with David, is for a moment, but the reverberations sound eternally and the powers of darkness and hell are compelled to their loss to acknowledge it. The wisdom of the powers is that self-preservation is the evident first principle of life. The issue of the Davidic Kingdom was at stake eternally in David's utterly free choice, when he was free to do in a moment of supreme test "what seemed good to him to do". Even though the issue at stake, as with Isaac, is not just the preservation of the temporal life but the very promises of God, God must be trusted for that fulfillment and not the "stretching forth" of one's own hand in expediency.

This is more than a shallow reflex action. This is a man who sees the issue of honor and issue of God as one. He considered the things that are pleasing in God's sight to be of such a premium that even if it meant the loss of his own life he had no alternative but to yield. David could not, even in the defense of his own life, allow himself a course of conduct contrary to the holiness of God. That is a remarkable mentality. It is a mentality that has risen far above the earthly, the mundane, the self-justifying, to perceive the glory of God.

What we reveal in such ultimate moments is what we in fact are. The powers can look upon us, upon our fellowships at our finest and best and say undisturbedly, "Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are you?" Why do we not terrify these powers? Why do we not constitute a threat to their interests who have till now manipulated entire nations? There is only one thing that can jerk them out of their orbit, one thing that can complete the defeat suffered at the Cross--and that is that the same wisdom displayed at the Cross be again and finally demonstrated through His Body, the Church. That same wisdom, that same selflessness, that same magnanimity unto death that though being killed by inches most cruelly will not respond in kind. We, like Him, will not come down from the Cross of affliction--nor the threat of it--no matter how taunted or mocked.

This is the demonstration of the Davidic Kingdom that is meek, willing to allow its life to be expended rather than to do what in fact Jesus could have done--called down legions. Like David, He had all power in His hand to do away with His tormentors. In the cruel taunts rained upon Him to get Him to come on to their ground "You saved others now save yourself"--He, like David, could not save Himself because He was King of another Kingdom!

David calls out to the astonished Saul, "The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee: but my hand shall not be upon thee"(v.12). The confidence that David is exhibiting is more than bravado. It is predicated on such a knowledge of God and such a trust in His sovereignty, that even if He should allow him to be Saul's victim, so be it. But he cannot preserve himself. It would have contradicted the very nature of Christ and therefore the character of the Kingdom to do so. A King who would have saved Himself could not have saved us.

Why are we so contentious then in the name of righteousness and 'the purposes of God'? How often are our contentions in behalf of righteousness unrighteous? Strangely, it is what we do in defensive of spiritual issues that more often reveals us for what we are. What is needed is David's confidence that God is well able to perfect what pertains unto Himself without 'stretching forth' our arm. It may be that we who have been waiting the end of soulish religious systems and the unrighteous governments of men would have gone much further than the mere cutting off of the corners of robes. There may even have been a 'prophetic word' given that could have been interpreted to justify our self-initiated act. May we not miss the critical test when it will assuredly come in the moment that catches us unawares when we are utterly free to do what seems good unto ourselves to do.

Dense, coarse, brutal man that Saul was, he still had to acknowledge "Thou art more righteous than I...for if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away?" Even the most implacable enemies of truth and righteousness are compelled to acknowledge a greater wisdom--one that contradicts the unspoken, assumed, universally held premise of the world, self-preservation at any cost. Is this not the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees? Not the righteousness of impeccably maintained principles but that of the more costly forfeiture of one's life itself that alone demonstrates the very nature, character (wisdom) of God.

They Loved Not Their Lives

I was involved with a Christian missionary community in Zimbabwe, Africa. They lived in a hazardous area three hundred miles from the capitol roamed by the tribe that was out of power. There were armed insurgents that delighted in intimidating and murdering white farmers. Yet this community had no weapons and chose not to defend themselves. "Let God be our defense," they said One night death came with great suddenness. One by one, with their hands tied behind their backs with barbed wire, they were taken into a building and hacked to death with an axe that no shots might be heard.

I learned later that there was not a whimper, one scream, one pleading for their lives. Somehow they had a sublime confidence in the sovereignty of God, though it flies in the face of every category of natural and even religious reckoning. Though they had been a blessing to the native villagers about them, and had built fish ponds, chicken coops, and had lifted the depressed economy of the area, in a moment that came without warning, they went to their death like lambs. What a waste--or was it?

It was a waste unless, in their silence, their sacrifice, in their sublime confidence that God who could have protected them chose without explanation not to, something was worked that has eternal consequences. Could it be that God did not care nearly as much about the ponds and chicken coops as He did the fulfillment of a wisdom demonstrated through a willing Church that there is something more important than this life? Everything is preparation for that witness whether or not it is required.

"But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven. Therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Mt.5:44-45,48)

God is waiting; creation itself groaning and travailing, waiting for the manifestation of such sons. This age will end by a Church of the same character revealed in extremity as was demonstrated by Jesus, Stephen, David--and the saints at Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. We may have a right to contend as sufferers of injustice and oppression, but there is a wisdom of a greater power revealed in not contending as an ultimate expression of trust in God. In this way the conventional wisdom is revealed as false and its captives set free. For, by so doing, the ultimate validity of eternity that alone frees men from the intimidating tyranny of fear for this life is proclaimed in this present world.

This is liberation. Wherever there is on this earth a congregation freed from the false wisdom of the principalities and powers, consistently and unselfconsciously maintained, there the essence of the Davidic Kingdom is already displayed and its coming hastened.

As the contrite Saul was obliged to acknowledge, so also then the defeated powers:

"And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the Kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand." (I Sam. 24:20)

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