

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, April 26, 2020

“King David Takes Responsibility”

Second of six in a sermon series entitled “Kings of the Bible”
Third Sunday of Easter

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Christian Scripture: I Chronicles 21:1-30

Listen to the following:

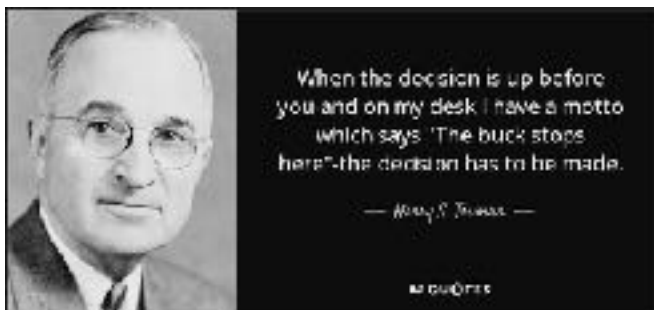
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cojjDEMGF-4>



[Welcome to the second of six sermons that focus on the historical biographies of biblical ‘kings’. In this series entitled “Kings of the Bible”, we will move from one end of the Bible to the other mining spiritual lessons learned from scriptural rulers. My aim is to apply these lessons to our own lives and to those who we choose to be our leaders. This week, we continue with King David and his willingness to admit when he is wrong and to take responsibility for his actions.]



President Harry Truman had a sign on his White House Oval Office desk that read "The Buck Stops Here". Fred Canfil, then United States Marshal for the Western District of Missouri and a friend of Truman, asked that the sign be made for the President. The sign was made and mailed to the President on October 2, 1945.¹



“The buck stops here” derives from the slang expression ‘pass the buck’ which means ‘passing the responsibility on to someone else’. But, not many people know what a ‘buck’ is. No, it’s not a deer nor a dollar bill. Apparently, during the frontier days in the game of poker, a ‘marker’ or ‘counter’ used a knife with a buckhorn handle to indicate

¹ Harry Truman Museum and Library, National Archives, “The Buck Stops Here” Desk Sign’, found at: <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/trivia/buck-stops-here-sign>, accessed April 25, 2020.

the person whose turn it was to deal. If the player did not wish to deal, he could pass the responsibility by passing the ‘buck’, as the counter came to be called, to the next player.² So, to ‘pass the buck’ came to mean ‘refusing to accept responsibility’.



Our story this morning is about King David who did not ‘pass the buck’. In other words, King David took responsibility. He did so by admitting his mistake and held himself accountable for it. Accepting responsibility and being accountable for one’s actions are signs of competent and trustworthy leadership in both the secular and religious realms. So, let’s examine King David and his leadership style as narrated in this story from I Chronicles.³

We skipped a lot moving from Ramses II to King Daid. In between, there are a number of Hebrew rulers known as ‘judges’.

² Harry Truman Museum and Library, National Archives, “The Buck Stops Here” Desk Sign’, found at: <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/trivia/buck-stops-here-sign>, accessed April 25, 2020.

³ I credit my friend and mentor, David Stinson (who served as the bridge minister before my arrival) for inspiring this sermon. David and I discussed the lessons learned from Ramses II with me and we continued with King David. It was David that suggested the profound meaning of King David and the plague and believed there might be much food for thought. David was so right. I give God thanks for wonderful colleagues who gently guide and teach.



Samuel was the last judge. Samuel strongly advised against authority being placed in the hands of a king. In I Samuel 8:10-22, Samuel warned the people that a king will ‘extract’ from the people. He will extract their sons as soldiers and their daughters as servants. A king will extract from their fields, both crops and livestock. A king will extract from their pockets and build for his own glorification.

Nonetheless, the people clamoured for a king, and Samuel selected Saul (I Samuel 9). Saul had his own interesting story. Power negatively affected him. Samuel chose King David, the last born son of seven who was but a shepherd (I Samuel 16), to be the next king.



David was brave, for he killed the Philistine giant Goliath (I Samuel 17). David was also a poet and musician who soothed Saul’s

nerves by playing the harp. David was what one might call in South Africa, an 'all-rounder'. David could pitch, bat, and field! Yet, David's greatest attribute, despite all his faults, was that he was a man of faith. The scriptures tell us that because of David's faith, God enabled him to be first king to unite the twelve tribes of Israel into one coherent, whole, and unified nation-state. David passed-on this unified nation to his son, Solomon. After Solomon, the nation divided and was conquered by many nations for hundreds of years - including by the Romans who ruled during Jesus' ministry.

Satan arose against Israel and incited David to number Israel. David said to Joab and to the commanders of the army, "Go and count Israel from Beer-sheba to Dan and bring me..."

In our story, David commits the sin of 'counting', that is, he ordered a census be taken. His advisors, notably Joab, tried to dissuade David. But, David was obstinate. Now, what is wrong with a census? Well, many things. Practically speaking, counting facilitated conscription and taxation - that is human and financial extraction. More importantly is what the counting meant spiritually. You see, in Ancient Near East thinking, one 'counts' only what one owns. Counting meant that the people and their possessions belonged to David, when

in fact all belonged to God. So, David, by counting, effectively took from God. Second, by counting, for example, soldiers, David enumerated the military power and thus placed his trust in that power, and not in God.

That explains David's sin. Let's examine David's redemption. But, before we go any farther, allow me to make one thing very very clear. This is a 'story'; its entirety is not to be interpreted literally.



Friends, we are in the midst of a pandemic, COVID-19, 'a plague', if you will. Do I believe that God sends plagues to kill people, let alone innocent people, for the sins of individuals? No!!! Of course not! But people in the Ancient Near East did because they did not have the science to explain how microorganisms operate. So, it would be very wrong to think that God sent COVID-19 to punish China, Italy, Spain, or

the United States. That is not the point of the I Chronicles story. The intention of this story is to describe the David's character and thus how a leader of faith should act and behave.

God gave David a choice of three punishments. David possibly rejected famine because he knew that the rich, including himself and his family, would escape this punishment. The rich and powerful can buy their way out of just about anything and this would not be fair. David possibly rejected the invasion of armies because as commander-in-chief, he and his family would again be relatively safe. The soldiers and the populous would be at the end of an un-merciful enemy's sword. David chose the plague because, unlike famine and war, a plague may not spare David and his family, for a plague does not discriminate. David possibly chose the punishment that potentially held him personally accountable for his own stupidity.

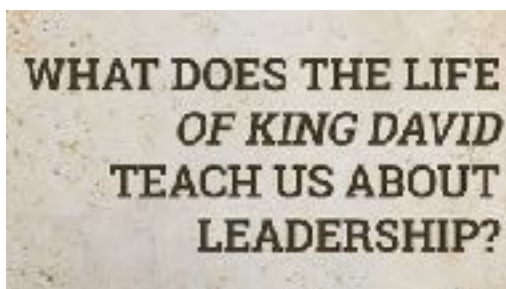


To repent for his sin, God commanded David to build a place of worship to remind him and the people to whom *he* and they belonged.

David refused to accept *donated* land to build the worship site because to do so would be no sacrifice on his part. So, David ensured that he was accountable for his sin by paying the full price for the land.



What is spiritually symbolic about this story is that the location where David built the place of worship is the same place that Isaac almost sacrificed Jacob, where David's son (Solomon) built the temple, and where Jesus was crucified.



The take-away from our story in I Chronicles is not that David screwed-up (though he did). The take-away is that David accepted responsibility for his error, he repented, he chose a punishment in which he and his family would be affected, and he paid a price to redeem himself. That is leadership.



Responsible, adult, and godly leadership listens to and heeds the counsel of advisors and experts, such as Joab. Responsible, adult, and godly leadership does not say “I take no responsibility”. Responsible, adult, and godly leadership does not ‘pass the buck’ and blame everyone and anyone else but himself. The life of King David teaches us that the signs of leadership are not necessarily perfection and sinless-ness, but rather humility to admit mistakes, not ‘pass the buck’, repent, and redeem oneself by acting honourably.

This is the Word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.