David and the Generosity of God
1 Chronicles 29

Today we're finishing our series on the life of David, and we're going to look at an event which one commentator calls the climax of David's life. And I read something a few weeks back about the fact that there comes a time in the life of a president or a prime minister, when they start looking to their legacy. What can they achieve in their final months in office that will leave their mark on history.

And today we're going to see David doing the same. Except, what's extraordinary is that the legacy he wants to leave is not about him at all.

Reading: 1 Chronicles 29:1-21, 22, 26-28.

We're going to look at three things: attitudes you want to cultivate; examples you want to follow and the power that enables you to do it.

Attitudes you Want to Cultivate
Now, do you have a Bucket List? Before you die you want to go base jumping or visit Bognor Regis - things you want to do, places you want to visit before you die? Well, David's now an old man, and he's got this one, last project he wants to accomplish before he dies. Years before God had refused his request to build God a temple, and instead God had promised him that he would build a house, a royal family line, for David, and he had. And yet David's longing hadn't diminished. Maybe in the face of God's kindness to him it had increased. So whilst he knew he couldn't build this house he would do all he could to make sure Solomon, his son, could.

Look at v1-2: "Solomon my son… is young and inexperienced, and the work is great, for the palace will not be for man but for the Lord God. So I have provided for the house of my God."

And David lists all the gold and silver and bronze and iron and wood and precious stones he's put aside to see this temple built. And now, with death approaching, he's also giving all his own personal wealth, his savings, his pension pot, his investments, to see this temple built. Except, he won't see it, will he? He'll be dead and gone years before this project is completed.

Now, why would someone do that? What are some of the wrong reasons people might give to, or be involved in, some religious project - big or small? It could be all about them, couldn't it? It could be to buy my way into heaven, or earn favour with the gods, or to make a name for myself, or have people notice me, or get some recognition.

But did you notice how David describes this building project? In v1, 19 he calls it, 'the palace'. So for David this was about building the one, signature, landmark building in the whole kingdom that showed off the glory of the king. Except David knows that he's not the king whose glory this palace is going to show off, and neither is Solomon. Verse 11, "Yours is the kingdom, O Lord." So, for David, this wasn't about how great he was, or him leaving his mark, this was about acknowledging who the real king over Israel and the world was.

And that's an extraordinary attitude, isn't it? I mean, firstly, how easy do you find it to promote someone else, or deflect people's attention on to someone else when it could come your way? That can chafe sometimes, can't it? Or what about working and giving for something you'll never get to enjoy, that you'll never get any benefit from? And we can think, why would I want to do that?

But here we see David living - and dying - for a vision greater than himself.

And there's a beauty and dignity in that kind of attitude to life, isn't there? I mean, compare that to someone who becomes more and more self-centred or self-absorbed with age, and who wants the attention to be on them, and who thinks that life and the resources they have, are about making a name, or building a reputation or getting the recognition, they deserve.

And I suspect all of us would rather be like David than that.

And yet, it's not just David who gives is it? Verse 6-8, 'Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes…and whoever had precious stones gave them.' And there's this outpouring of generosity among the people.

But what's so striking about it is not so much the amounts they give as their joy as they do it: v9, 'Then the people rejoiced… David the king also rejoiced greatly.' And it ends in a feast, v22, 'And they ate and drank before the Lord on that day with great gladness.' Gladness, feasting, joy.

Now, what does 'rejoicing greatly' look like? Imagine you're at a football match, at the cup final, and your team scores the winning goal, you and all your fellow supporters go wild! You're out of your seats, your arms are in the air, cheers fill the stadium. You rejoice greatly.

Now, if you or I were *given* something of great value, something you've always really wanted, you might rejoice like that, mightn't you? But these guys are behaving like that as they give away their wealth. They're overwhelmingly happy, they're eating and drinking and celebrating and enjoying being generous.

Now, I know Christmas is long gone, but compare that to how Dickens describes Scrooge, the main character in A Christmas Carol: Scrooge was 'A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck generous fire.' And that selfishness, that reluctance and then refusal to give to others, which Scrooge has mastered over the years had left a legacy of isolation in his life. He was, Dickens says, 'Secret, self-contained, and solitary as an oyster.'

Now, sure, Scrooge is a caricature, but, still, he's this sobering picture of the trajectory of a life that closes in on itself and shuts its heart to outsiders, of a closed hand becoming a closed heart. Whilst David, and the people, find a joyful freedom in giving. It really is more blessed to give than to receive.

You see, you know the negative power of money in your life, don't you? You've experienced the hold it can have on you. And having money can be a huge help. And yet, it can have this power over our hearts, because it leaves us thinking we never have quite enough, I could do with a just little bit more. And it tells us that if we have more we'll be more free, but in reality it closes us in, because we think we need to hold on to it, or have even more of it, which limits and restricts this real freedom of generosity.

But of course it doesn't have to be the overt miserliness of a Scrooge, does it? It could be the much more respectable self-indulgence, and we spend, on ourselves, rather than save. But whether we're saving or spending we're saying, this is for me.

And yet, when you look at those two polar attitudes, joy filled generosity or money is mine, which would you rather cultivate? One that leaves you emotionally guarded to those around you, or one that leads to the joyful, free abandon of David and his people?

And David's not just investing his *financial* capital in this, is he? He's also investing his leadership capital, his social capital, his influence, to motivate and spur others on.

Now, maybe, in your work life, you've encountered people where you've felt like they've used you for their own ends. They made a big deal about having you in on the project, but in reality it was all about them. But, hopefully, you've also met people along the way who've motivated you and helped you as a mentor, and they've invested time in you and it's not been about them at all, it's been about them helping you. And we admire that when we see it.

And here, David uses his leadership capital, not to promote himself, but to point people to something higher; not so that he gets more glory, but so God does. And if we admire that kind of attitude in others, we're saying I want to be like that: To use the skills and resources we have to point others, our kids, our friends, our colleagues, away from ourselves, to a goal far higher.

And yet, if we're honest, we do struggle with these kinds of attitudes, don't we? Finding joy and freedom in generosity can seem hard. And we know that temptation to think life is about me and trying to organise people and finances around that.

So… what do David and the people know that helps them behave like this? What's happening at the level of their hearts that means they can rejoice when they give what's precious to them away, and make God their focus, not them?

An Example You Want to Follow

Now, there is a huge power in example, isn't there? Celebrities earn thousands off their endorsements - if you buy this, you can be like me. And you see someone you admire behaving, or dressing, in a certain way and, for good or bad, you follow.

And when it came to joy-filled generosity towards the work of God, David was the people's example. Look at v5, as David says to the people, "Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the Lord?" He's just told them all that he has given and then he asks, who of you will do the same, but give not just your money, but yourself to God? 'Will you willingly, happily, joyfully give your life to him?' And they do - because there's nothing like someone else's life to inspire you, and they've watched as David has done exactly what he's challenging them to do.

And there's nothing like seeing in someone else a love for God, or a generosity of Spirit, or a love for others, to make you think - I want to be like them. God, do in me what you've done in them.

Now, David has been far from exemplary in some areas of his life. And yet, as he reaches the end of his life he is setting an awesome example to a nation. And that should give everyone of us hope, shouldn't it. Because we might think, 'man, I've not been a great example in this or that area.' But David tells us, that whatever our past, as we let these God-glorifying attitudes grow in us, we can leave a legacy in the lives of those around us that points away from ourselves to Someone much higher.

But if David was the people's example, who was David's example? Where did he learn generous, joy-filled giving from? And the answer is, God.

Firstly, David knows that everything belongs to God. Verse 11, "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours." And because David knows that, he knows that everything he possesses has been given him by God. Verse 12, "Both riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all."

Look at that list, and think which of those does David have. Riches? Tick. Honour? Tick. Power and might? Tick. Greatness and strength? Tick. But he knows that all of those, any financial wealth or social capital he possesses has been given him by God who's the fountain of them all. It's why he says in v14, "For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you." And v16, "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own."

In others words, God, we can only give abundantly like this to you, because you have given far more abundantly to us. We can only be generous like this because you are super generous.

And yet, David knows even more than that. He knows that it's his and the people's privilege to be allowed to give. Verse 14, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly?" Because, v15: "We are strangers before you and sojourners… Our days on earth are like a shadow and there is no abiding."

Now you know what it's like to be a temporary resident somewhere. Maybe you've stayed somewhere on holiday. Or maybe you're only here for a short time before you go back to wherever home is. Well, David knows that he, and the people, and you and I are just temporary residents here, that we're just passing through earth. Even more, we're like a puff of smoke, here one minute, gone the next. Even our great grandchildren won't know our names. And that profoundly humbles David. He sees what he is like in comparison to God, and he realises that he's nothing.

And yet, despite that, God has poured out all these good things into his lap and allowed him to be a part of his plans. And David's amazed by that. And that kind of awe-filled, joy-filled amazement is so different from the pride of thinking it's all your own, isn't it. And way more attractive.

You see, just like David, whatever we have has been given us by God. If you're doing well at work, he's lifted you up; if you have strength to keep going in the hard times - he's working that in you. If you have skills and talents or influence that make you effective in some area, these are God's gifts to you. And knowing that and being humbled by that didn't leave David feeling down, or with 'a poor self-image'; it lifted him up. It filled his heart with joy. 'I don't deserve any of this, and yet you've given it to me'.

And David has entered the last stretch of his life. And he has all this past behind him. He carries the scars of someone involved in leadership over decades. And yet, he's not cynical or self-absorbed. How come? Because he knows how great and high and generous God is, and how small and low he is. He's still amazed by grace.

Now, if it maybe true that you are what you eat, it is most certainly true that you become what you worship. Worship money and you become cold and hard. Worship self, and you become increasingly self-centred. But worship a God of overflowing, gracious generosity and you become generous.

In the film 'The Greatest Showman' the character Jenny Lind sings the song, Never Enough: 'All the shine of a thousand spotlights / All the stars we steal from the night sky /Will never be enough / Never be enough / Towers of gold are still too little / These hands could hold the world but it'll / Never be enough.

In other words, she is willing to give up fame and fortune, knowing they could never satisfy her, for the love of one man. The problem is, what she gets wrong, is that the man she loves is already married.

But what she gets right is that you willingly give up something valuable if you love the person you're giving it up for more. And David can willingly, joyfully, give all this wealth away, because he loves God more than his wealth, because God has won his heart, because he knows deep down that God is more valuable to him than fortune, more beautiful to him than fame.

And that is why God is much more interested in our hearts than the amount of our giving. David prays in v17, "I know, my God, that you test the heart." Because you can give lots away, and it still be about you. You can give lots away and do it because you think God is demanding and somehow you have to appease him and buy his favour with your giving. But, you can also have very little to give away, but what you do give is all about him and because you love him. And when you do you become what Paul calls in 2 Cor 9, 'a cheerful giver', the kind of giver God loves. Or, as David says here, v17, a giver "Offering freely and joyously to you."

So the people had a great example in David. And David's heart had been overwhelmed by the generosity of God to him. What can do it for us? What can work these life-changing attitudes of humility and joyful generosity and God-centredness into our hearts?

The Power that Enables You to Do It

You see, if David had reason to believe that God was gracious and generous, how much more do we? Because here David and the people are giving their wealth to build a house for God - that God might live among them as king. But Jesus came as the one greater than the temple, as Emmanuel, God with us, God come as a man to walk among us.

And here David knows that the riches and honour and power and strength that he enjoys come from God. But when Jesus came, he laid all those aside. David has honour, but think how much more honour the Son of God had: worshipped by angels, loved by the Father and the Spirit from all eternity; but he laid that aside and came as a man and instead of receiving honour he was mocked by those he had created. And David has riches. But think how greater the riches of Christ were - everything in heaven and earth is his: but he laid those riches aside and became poor, with no where to lay his head. And David has power: but think how much greater power God the Son had, king over all creation, but he laid it aside, and submitted himself to the authority of men who abused him, men unworthy to undo this sandals. And David has strength, but think of the strength of Christ, that just with a word he can create galaxies and throw stars into space, but he laid it aside and was beaten, flogged, crucified and died in weakness.

And he does it all to rescue us from the penalty of our ingratitude for his gracious gifts, thinking these are ours; for those times when we've used them as if they were our own or used others for our own glory. When we have been proud rather than humble. And instead of treating us as we deserve to be treated he gives up everything that he might give us everything: the true riches found in him, the honour of his love, the power of reigning with him and the strength to endure.

And, here, the people feast, rejoicing in the joy of generosity, but Christ gave himself to bring us to the greatest feast - the feast of his generosity, the banquet of his love.

And so David was humbled and lifted up - and in response he was so happy to give. And as you and I consider what our hearts are really like, and that the Son of God had to die to rescue us, we're humbled; but as we realise he did die for us, that God gave the greatest of all gifts, the infinite value of his Son, to bring us to himself, we're lifted up - as we realise we are loved with a love like that - and in response we know what an honour and joy it is to give for his glory.

So, just like David we don't deserve this grace. We don't deserve Jesus, or his love, or his Spirit, or his forgiveness, or his many gifts, but he pours them into our lives because God is the generous, giving God. Let's let that melt our hearts, and then use our finances and whatever social capital we possess to glorify God and point people higher.