

Poured Out Before the Lord

This is the last Sunday we will be meeting in the sanctuary until the remodeling project is completed. Knowing this would be the final service in here, I want to do a little reminiscing, but first I want to tell you a story found in 2 Samuel 23. This story is actually told here and in 1 Chronicles 11. The context for the story is in recalling some exploits of King David's secret service detail and some of his special ops guys.

Bible scholars disagree as to whether this happened before or after David was made king. I think it was before. You remember David was just a shepherd boy when he was anointed by Samuel and told he would someday be king. As a young man, perhaps a teenager, he killed the Philistine giant, Goliath and became an overnight sensation. People began to sing, "King Saul has slain his thousands but David has slain tens of thousands." Saul was jealous and tried to kill David so David had to run for his life. Fearing Saul would kill his family, he took his mother and father with him and finally left them under the protection of the king of Moab. David then hid in the cave of Adullam, about 12 or 13 miles from his hometown of Bethlehem. The bible tells us members of his extended family, his "kinsmen" heard where he was and came to help him. The bible says **"All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him."** **1 Samuel 22:2** These men had likely been mistreated by King Saul and were ready to back a new king, a new leader, David. Among those who joined David were some extraordinary warriors. "Mighty men" the bible called them.

Not only was Saul looking for David to kill him, but Israel's enemy the Philistines were camped in the Valley of Rephaim with their garrison at that time at Bethlehem, David's hometown. David was boxed in, with Saul and his army on one side looking for him, and the Philistine army on the other, David just has to wait it out with his men in the cave of Adullam.

Try to imagine David hiding in that cave. He was a man of action but now he's boxed in with nowhere to go. Trapped, bored, he starts thinking about all that's happened in a short amount of time. It wasn't that long ago he was taking care of his father's sheep in the fields around Bethlehem. Although Samuel told him God had chosen him to be king someday, not that much had changed. David went back to his sheep, back to playing his harp, writing songs, practicing with his sling. He was content and happy. Then one day his father sent him to the Valley of Elah to check on his older brothers who were fighting the Philistines with Saul's army.

The next thing you know he answers the enemy's challenge, kills Goliath the Philistine giant with a sling shot and becomes a national hero. He is brought into special service to Israel's king, Saul. He becomes best friends to the crown prince, Jonathan. He even marries one of the king's daughters, but then Saul becomes obsessed with the idea David is going to kill him and take the throne. Threatened and insecure, Saul tries to kill David and now in a short amount of time he has gone from national hero to a wanted man, hiding in a cave with enemies on every side.

No wonder he thinks back to simpler times. "Remember how it used to be? So quiet and peaceful. The only thing I had to fear was an occasional lion trying to get at the sheep, but I could handle them with my sling and a couple of well placed stones. It was an easier time. Everything made sense. I wish it could just be like it was. No more changes. It's too much!"

Do you ever feel that way? You just wish you could go back to simpler times, to the way it used to be? The good old days of life and church and family? Everything was simpler then. You knew what to expect. It all made sense then. David thinks, "Remember the cool water we used to draw from the well right there by the city gate of Bethlehem. It was the sweetest, coolest water. If only it could be like it used to be. If only things didn't have to change." Not realizing anyone was even listening, aloud David says, **"Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" 2 Samuel 23:15**

Most of you know I'm not a fan of change. I like things to stay the same. I'm happy holding on to the past. While writing this sermon I looked up to the top shelf of my study to see my lunch box from elementary school next to a stuffed lion I had when I was a little boy. I'm a little on the sentimental side, so the thought of changing the footprint of the church, changing the look of the sanctuary again, doesn't come easy to me.

50 years ago this summer my parents and I moved to Tulsa. This facility was under construction and we began attending Carbondale when it was still in its' original location just a few blocks northwest of this location. (Pictures of the old church interior?)

How many remember the sanctuary in 1967 when we moved here? It was so modern, so cool. I had been baptized in Muskogee but I got baptized again in that baptistry by Bro. Pieratt. My teenaged years were spent in that sanctuary, with that design. Singing in the third generation choir, praying around those altars, learning to sing and preach and pray, learning to listen to the voice and guidance of the Holy Spirit. That was a precious place. Lots of good memories.

Paula and I were elected as your pastors in 1985 and in 1990 the sanctuary was remodeled. I remember walking through the sanctuary the night before the demolition was to begin, thinking about all that had happened in that sanctuary, from '67 to '90. We were married in that sanctuary. So many memories, weddings and funerals, baby dedications and sweet services, precious visitations around the altar. Why couldn't it all stay the same? Why couldn't we freeze those moments? But we knew it was time for a change. It was time to let go.

Nine years later on May 4, 1999 a tornado ripped through our church facility. (Pictures of church). Change had come again. I remember telling one of the television reporters that this was only the building the church met in. The church was fine because the church was the people that met in the building, but at the same time, the building itself held some sweet and precious memories for all of us. That's the way I feel about it now. There have been more of those precious moments made here. I've said goodbye to my mother and father in this sanctuary. It holds a tender spot in my heart. But we can't freeze those moments either.

David's nostalgic thoughts of home and that sweet water from the well, memories of simpler times, of precious moments, that reflection is suddenly broken by his three men who hand him a cup of water. "What's this?" "It's water from the well at Bethlehem. We got it for you. We knew how special it was to you." These three men had overheard what David said and at risk to their own lives, traveled the 12-15 miles behind enemy lines to Bethlehem, made their way to the well, drew water and brought it all the way back to David.

David holds the cup in his hands and says, "Far be it from me to drink this water. These men risked their lives to get this for me. It's too precious for me to drink. It's too precious for me to just hold it or keep it. There's only one thing to do. It must be offered to God." So David poured the water out before the Lord as a drink offering, a libation. **"But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord." 2 Samuel 23:16**

It's as if all those memories from the good old days in Bethlehem were in that cup and David was going to have to decide what to do with it. Would he try to hold on to the past, try to force his way back to a simpler, easier, more carefree time, or would he offer it to the Lord and pour it out to God, choosing to move forward in the plan God had prepared for him. Choosing God's way, letting go of the past would mean continuing to hide from Saul in the cave of Adullam for who knows how long. It would mean all the pressure and stress of accepting the throne and becoming King. In that moment, David chose to pour it out, offering it all to God. It

was an act of surrender in a way, of choosing God's path, God's will, God's way. It was a way of letting go of what had been, not forgetting the past, still honoring the memories, but choosing to move on to what God had for him in the future.

I don't know if this makes sense to anyone else, but when I think of this sanctuary, (and I realize the building isn't going away, but the next time we meet in here it's going to look much different) I think of all the blessings and services and memories that have happened here over the past fifty years. I think, "Can't we just keep everything the way it was, the way it is? Just hold on a while longer?" But I realize we can't. I can't. We aren't supposed to. Sure we can hold on to the memories, we should do that, but we can't go back to a simpler time. We aren't supposed to go back, we are supposed to go forward in the anointing of the Holy Spirit to what God has prepared for us. We have to decide: will we choose our own path or the path forward God has for us? Will we try to hold on to the cup of water from our well, our past, or will we pour it out before the Lord in obedience and surrender?

The three men weren't offended by David's actions. They understood, David was honoring their sacrifice, esteeming it highly by offering their sacrifice to the Lord. I look at this sanctuary and think of the sacrifices made in the past fifty years. I was here. I know the cost. I may be sentimental about changes but I'm not offended by the changes that are coming. We are honoring the past by offering this facility to God and saying, "Here Lord, it belongs to you. Leads us as you please. Keep taking us forward into your purpose and plan."

David couldn't go back to being a shepherd boy, but God had ordained that he go forward to become the shepherd king of Israel. The water in that cup from his past was sweet for sure, but God had sweeter water from deeper wells that were meant for David.

We could choose to hold on to the water from the well of Bethlehem. We could choose to hold on to the building or the design or the style of the past, but I have to believe God is calling us to pour something out to him because he has something better in the future.

The water those men brought David was too precious to be held onto just for himself and he realized he had to pour it out before the Lord. This place, with all of its memories is too precious, too sacred to be held onto just for me and my memories, just for the sake of me and my preferences, just so I don't have to give up my comfort. It is sacred and as such it belongs to the Lord. It's his church, his sanctuary, created, built, designed, for his purpose -- not to be held,

frozen in time like a museum piece, but it belongs to the Lord and is meant to be used by Him in new ways, in greater fashion for His greater glory.

So with all those memories of the past, I stand here ready to say, “Lord, I pour it out before you. I offer all our past and all of our present and all of our future to you. It’s your church. Make of us what you will. Do with us as you please. Use us and use this facility as you choose. All I ask is that your Holy Spirit continue to lead us, guide us, and show us the way forward that we can forever and always lift up Jesus and bring honor and glory to you.”

Let me ask you, is there something you need to turn loose of? Something you need to pour out before the Lord? Maybe there’s something you’ve been clinging to, something you’ve been holding on to, afraid to let go and yet today you realize it’s time to pour it out before the Lord. You may be holding on to a cup of water, thinking this is as sweet and as good as it gets, but the truth is that water, even if it’s from Bethlehem, it won’t ever truly satisfy. But there is water that comes from another King who was born in Bethlehem and he says “Whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst again. In fact, it will well up inside you like a spring of living water!”

It’s time to turn loose of something you’ve been holding on to so you can embrace what God has for you now, for the future. It’s time to pour out the old so we can drink from the new!

“Lord, we pour our lives out before you. We offer all of our past, all of our present and all of our future to you. We are your church. Make of us what you will. Do with us as you please. Use us and use this facility as you choose. All we ask is that your Holy Spirit continue to lead us, guide us, and show us the way forward that we can forever and always lift up Jesus and bring honor and glory to you.”