

Wholehearted
Sermon for Sunday 4th July 2021
Rev Hamish Galloway

Text: 2 Samuel, 5 & 6

Introduction:

There is a marked difference between being wholehearted and half-hearted. David was definitely wholehearted in what he did. Another way to describe this trait in David is to say he was 'all in'.

"All in" is a phrase used when playing poker. It relates to being so confident that you have a winning hand, you bet everything you have on it!

It is a phrase that can be more widely applied to situations in life where we wholeheartedly give something all we have got!

I belong to a Tuesday night pub quiz team. We take it very seriously and often do well. Usually we are 'all in'. We lean in to the table to discuss and debate each question, wringing every ounce of knowledge from each brain to come up with the right answer. We are, indeed, 'all in'! However, on this last Tuesday night the questions did not go our way. We did poorly in the early rounds and began to lose interest. We sat back rather than leaned in. Two team members went off to the pokies between rounds, and one did not make it back for the next round. We became careless with answers, just going through the motions – at the end of the night we gained a 1st.... that is, the 1st time we ever came last in the quiz – and last by quite a margin, I might add!

The contrast between being 'all in' and 'going through the motions' was palpable!

2 Samuel 5 & 6 describes a man who was 'all in', not one who was simply doing the formalities of life, work and worship. It seems to me to come out in 3 aspects in these 2 chapters:

1. All of us

One of David's great achievements was his unifying effect over the peoples of Judah and Israel. First, King of Judah for seven and a half years, then both Judah and Israel for thirty-three years. Previously two related but separate Israelite kingdoms, David brought them together and created safe, secure boundaries.

A key dimension of this was Jerusalem. Known as the 'city of peace', David adopted this concept as he adopted Jerusalem as his capital. It was historically neither of Judah nor Israel. It lay neatly on the border between the two kingdoms. It therefore became a unifying place, bringing these two people together. From this point on it came to be also referred to as Zion, carrying the meaning of a place where all peoples will be drawn in union around the acknowledgement of God the creator!

Think about that in terms of present-day Jerusalem! It is a place holy to Judaism, Christianity and Islam – all 3 of these major world religions present in force. And yet it is not the 'city of peace', the Zion, that David established. Instead, a shameful place of religious bickering! The vision lost.

And yet there is a vision. All of us together under God is the vision. Jerusalem is presently struggling with this. What about us? Renewed threats against a mosque in our city are alarming. But on the other side there has been a growing depth of conversation and respect between religious groups in the city since the mosque

shootings. One who has been an outstanding voice in this is Fared Ahmed. He survived the mosque attack, his wife did not. Yet he has been such an amazing voice for forgiveness and love. This week my wife Anne received an invitation from him headed "Promoting Unity in Diversity", in invitation to a meal, an Eid celebration, to mark the end of Ramadan.

That is a vision worthy of what David was doing in Jerusalem 2000 years ago!

It is an ultimate vision of heaven actually:

"After this I looked, and there was an enormous crowd – no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation and language, and they stood in front of the throne and of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They called out in a loud voice: 'Salvation comes from our God...'" (Revelations 7:9-10)

2. All of life

Remember the 1981 Springbok tour? One of the big arguments was about whether politics and sport should mix or be kept separate! Thankfully the 'mix' vote won that one.

Similarly people argue that politics and religion should not mix. David disagreed with that one. Having established Jerusalem as his capital, and planning to build a palace as the centre of political power for his kingdom, he then brings God into the centre of things as well. This is related in the narrative of the Ark of the Covenant coming into Jerusalem and being paraded to pride of place in the city, foreshadowing a planned temple. So not just a palace, but a palace and a temple were in David's plans for Jerusalem.

The Ark of the Covenant had a long a deeply significant history dating back to the Exodus. A box flanked by golden angels, it contained the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments, manna (the bread that satiated their hunger in the desert) and Aaron's rod, used to miraculous effect to help the people escape Egypt. So it contained symbols of

- God's instructions for a good life
- God's provision
- God's salvation

But, more than this, it was seen to contain the very presence of God, so powerful that to look upon it was to die. Hence in our passage, a piece we did not read, tells the story of Uzzah. He was guiding the cart carrying the Ark toward Jerusalem. The oxen stumbled, Uzzah reached out and steadied the Ark. Touching the Ark caused his death!!

The movie 'Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark' picks up on this when the baddies open the Ark; the presence of the Lord is so strong that they all disintegrate under the power of it!

David was bringing is powerful presence of God into the very same place as the seat of political power! They were to work together, inform each other, be in unison!

But to achieve this a rescue mission was necessary. The Ark had been taken 30 years before by a victorious Philistine army. David rescues it and brings it back to where it belongs, into the midst of the hustle and bustle of Jewish life.

How do we apply this one? With care. History tells us that it is easy to get it wrong. I saw a piece of art the other day that had a mannequin painted in the colours of the American flag holding a crucifix with the US flag on top and the \$ sign dangling from below. In the other hand was a gun! It painted a picture of religion and life that was, to my mind, dysfunctional in that it elevated nationalism, tagged in love of money and hinted at violence as the way to protect all this! And yet there are stunning example of faith impacting political situations for the better. Think of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. It was Gandhi who said:

“Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is.”

More functional is a spirituality that inhabits all of life, permeating all that we do. In Romans 12:1, Paul puts this so beautifully:

“So then my friends, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him. This is the true worship that you should offer.”

All of life is worship! Whether at the political level or the personal level our spirituality needs to be threaded through all we do and are. The Christian sitting in the pub with their friends needs to be recognizable as the person who sat in church on Sunday.

3. All of me

Twice in 2 Samuel 5 & 6 does it refer to worshipping with “all their might”.

Literally, this means ‘even the trees clap their hand out of love for our amazing creator.’

It is reminiscent of Isaiah 55:12:

‘You will leave Babylon with joy; you will be led out of the city in peace. The mountains and hills will burst into singing, and the trees will shout for joy.’

And so David strips off his outer garment, and dressed only in a loin cloth he gave himself up to ecstatic dance before the Ark. Accompanied by horns and cymbals and shouts of joy!

This stripping down is reminiscent of Adam and Eve in the garden – naked before God and unashamed. Here I am Lord, not covering up, but rather fully accessible to you!

So, too, David here is authentically and fully open to God, symbolised by the stripping away of his outer layers, the layers we often use to keep others and God at a safe distance.

No distance here God, says David by this act.... I want to be close and intimate!

At one level this was simply rituals of worship, following the Book of Order, so to speak. But the reaction of David’s estranged wife, Michal, suggests this was much more than simply following a prescribed ritual, going through the motions of religious ceremony. David’s excessive engagement was over the top as far as she was concerned! But for us it is actually a model of heartfelt, all in, all of me response to God!

Peterson remarks that David’s relationship with God is integrated into who he is as a person.

“It is impossible to understand a single thing about David apart from God Every aspect of David’s life was God-defined, God-saturated. Everything David knows about

God he experiences, enters into, embraces, takes into himself. God isn't a doctrine he talks about but a person by whom he is led..."

What brings that out in you? This spontaneous and heartfelt exuberant love of God expressed in praise and worship.

A beautiful sunset?

A stunning cathedral?

A touching sermon?

A rousing hymn?

A quiet still moment of reflection?

When it happens give yourself to this, uninhibited by what others may think, just as David did!

Conclusion

David rescued the Ark of the Covenant, bringing the unifying, society personally transforming presence of God into the centre of Jerusalem!

Over time another rescue mission became necessary. You see, as the temple got build, the ark was locked away in the Holy of Holies, accessible only to the High Priest once a year!

When Jesus died on the cross much changed, including the ripping of the curtain in the temple that cut off the Ark of the Covenant from the people. God's forgiveness is powered out for all people and, with Pentecost days later, this was then accompanied by the pouring out on all people of the Holy Spirit.... that we would raise open hands to God to humbly embrace and receive, all of us, all of life, all of me, flooded with the presence of God!