

Making a living from your faith

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everyone. We're so glad you came out to this. If you don't normally come out on Sunday evening to church, hooray, hooray, hooray, because this is a very special evening, and I'm just thrilled to death to be a part of this. I don't know what to say. I've known Rupert for a while now, a few years, and I'm just delighted, and you should be delighted too. This is a new day, a new day for this church, a new day for Scotland. You can say amen. All right, good. That's great.

If you have a Bible, it's Sunday evening. You can say amen. If you have a Bible, you'll want to turn with me to the book of 1 Chronicles. This is on page 356 in your Bibles here in the church, 1 Chronicles chapter 29, and this is a portion of the Bible that many of you have probably heard before, but we will see how Holy Spirit may lead us tonight to look into it together.

1 Chronicles chapter 29, beginning in verse 1. Hear now the word of our God. And David, the king, said to all the assembly, Solomon, my son, whom alone God has chosen, 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 so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for settings, and timony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones, and marble. Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the Lord my God, I give it to the house of my God. 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver for overlaying the walls of the house, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen, gold for the things of gold, and silver for the things of silver, who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the Lord. May God add his rich blessing to the reading of his words. Let's pray together. Our Lord Jesus, we bow before you now, because we call no one our teacher but you. We trust no one like we trust you. We hope in no one like we hope in you. We long to see no one like we long to see you. But here we are on this earth, left to do your bidding as your servants, and we're praying now that by Holy Spirit, you will now open our eyes and touch our hearts, warm us to this truth, and empower us that we may serve you more joyfully and more fully. And as you do that, we will give you the praise. We will give you the honor for it. Amen. It was nearly 40 years ago when I had a meeting like this, where I was called officially into the ministry of the gospel and ordained by in a situation much like we have here, from people from a variety of places doing a variety of things.

And after 40 years of doing this, I suppose I have the right to say something about it. What it means for you as the lay people of this church, what it means for Rupert, the candidate this evening, for us fellow ministers over here on this side. Aren't they awesome?

They look awesome to me. I suppose after 40 years, I might have learned something that might be of good. Well, as I search my heart and search my own life, what I always come back to is the thing that I used to teach students when I was a teacher of theological students, and here it is. When you make your living from your faith, when you make your living from your faith, you always run the risk of losing one or the other.

[4 : 26] That's a happy tone, isn't it? You know, when you become a professional Christian, it's an awesome thing, but at the same time, a terrifying thing.

Because if you have been in the body of Christ in this world for more than just a few years, you have seen people who are leaders of the church, who are professional Christians, who make their living from their faith, and who end up, because of failures of different sorts, actually losing their faith.

You find others who tend to hold on to their faith, but then because their convictions are such that the church is not willing to have it, and it leads to difficulties, they lose their living.

So it goes for leaders of the church, which is why all of us here this evening, as this holy moment is about to occur, should be prayerful for the young man who is about to step into the arena of becoming a professional religious worker, someone who makes his living from his faith, who from this point forward will be someone who's always in danger of losing one or the other.

We live in a day when there could be no greater need for leaders of the church. In fact, if you watch television at all, if you watch the news, you could honestly say, I think, that there is no greater day than we need leaders of the world.

[6 : 02] Things are a mess, aren't they? And I've watched enough of your television to know that when people run to become MPs, I know what it's like. Who is elected as an MP?

Someone who's popular. Someone who is celebrated. Someone who's a celebrity. Not necessarily the people who are gifted and even called to be leaders.

Because being a celebrity and being a leader are two very different things. And it's so much so for the body of Christ as well. We stand in a day when what we need, what you need in Scotland, is men who will stand and lead the church of Jesus in difficult times, in difficult ways, for the glory of Christ.

But the natural tendency for all of us is to say, well, what we want is someone who will be popular. Someone who will be fancy. Somebody who we can celebrate. And tonight we're going to celebrate one young man.

But I want to tell you this. If God is merciful, he will never become a celebrity. But he will be a leader of the body of Christ. Something quite different.

[7 : 13] We just read a passage in the Bible where there was a man who was both a celebrity and a leader. He had to learn how to lead, unfortunately, the hard way.

And he was a man who struggled with this reality of when you make your living from your faith, you tend to lose one or the other. His name was King David. And if there's anything that anyone knows about King David, if we were to walk out on the street tonight and ask someone, have you heard of King David in the Bible?

Yes, of course. You know what would come to mind immediately. Bathsheba. His great failure. Many people, even followers of Christ, don't even know the great things David accomplished.

All that we remember about him is Bathsheba. The great failure in David's life. And the trouble that came on his house for generations after generations because of this man who was called to lead the people of God.

And so naturally, as Christian people, when we read characters in the Bible or we look around ourselves at other people, our hearts and our minds yearn to see someone who will be a perfect leader.

[8 : 25] And you know what's so wonderful about it is we have one. He's only one, though, and his name is Jesus. Jesus, our Savior, was perfect from beginning to end. Perfect in every way as the leader of God's people.

But, you know, Rupert isn't Jesus. So, Rupert, you can't be just like Jesus. So, is there any hope for this man?

Is there any hope for you being led by men like this, who are frail, who are weak, who will have failings over and over and over again, and who probably in the end of things you could count more failures than more successes?

Is there any way for people like that to be counted as successful God-honoring leaders of the body of Christ? The answer is yes. And we find it right here in 1 Chronicles 29.

Because in this part of the Bible, we don't learn about Bathsheba. What we learn is David's life goes from greater to greater to greater to greater, despite his failures.

[9 : 29] And this chapter we just read is actually the grand finale of David's whole reign. He's now coming to the time of the end of his life when he's about to hand things to his son Solomon.

And this is not a sad day. It's not one where people look back with regret and say, Oh, he had such potential. He could have done so much more if he just hadn't failed.

That's not what happens here. What happens here is the great celebration of what God did in this man's life. Yes, this David. This David who failed because he was so frail.

Sometimes I think that when we think of Jesus as our exemplar, Jesus as our great leader, it's a wonderful thing to try to attain to who he was, but at the same time very difficult and very discouraging because we never make it.

We never make it. Body of Christ, please remember, this young man is never going to make that goal. But let me tell you something. Rupert, other pastors here in this church, these other pastors, even people like me, we can be like David.

[10 : 43] We can mess it up very badly. But in the end, by God's mercy, we can count it as good. And it's more good can come rather than bad. And wonderful things can be done for the kingdom of God by weak, frail people in ministry.

This passage is one of those rare times when you are able to actually look into the heart of a man like David. When you're able to see his motivations, his abilities, his skills as a leader of the people of God.

And what I'd like for us to do is to see how this chapter, just step by step, walks us deeper and deeper and deeper into the heart of a man who is a sinner, a man who is weak, but a man who succeeded as a leader of God's people.

And the very first thing that we can see from the passage we just read, beginning in verse two, shall we? I have provided for the house of my God. So far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and so on and so on.

If there's one thing that you can derive from this verse number two here, it is this. David was a practical leader. He knew how to set goals.

[12 : 07] He knew how to get the goals done. He was a great practical leader. We need certain amounts of bronze for the temple of God. We need certain amounts of wood. We need certain amounts of gold.

I can gather all that. I can light it up. I can set it up. Now, tonight we have a young man before us and he would not even be before us. He would not even have made it this far.

If you were not convinced he was this kind of leader. This is the easy part, Rupert. Able to make a plan and complete it.

Able to write a sermon and deliver it. Able to meet people, make them feel welcome. A man who is able to do the practicalities of everyday life.

This is what leaders of the church look for when they go around looking for people to become leaders in the future. And you have that. But that's just the beginning. The superficial of what it means to be a leader.

[13 : 03] A celebrity. That might be all that he has. But a leader of the people of God will go much further. And so does this passage.

As we take a look in verse three. Moreover, in addition to all I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own gold and silver because of my devotion to the house of my God.

I give it to the house of my God. Prior to this, in verse two, David's actually talking about the royal treasuries, the money of the state. And he's saying, I arranged it all.

I counted it all. I managed it all. I'm a practical leader. No problem. But here he's saying, now look, what I did was, I reached very deep down into my own pockets.

My own personal wealth. My own personal abilities. My own personal life. And I'm delivering that over to this great goal of building the temple of God.

[14 : 05] That's why we find in the New Testament, teaching very plainly, that elders are not to lead by coercion or by compulsion. Their people, but lead by their example.

The life of a person who is exemplary is a hard life. Because a leader has to walk a tightrope that's very difficult to walk as an example.

And here's the tightrope. You ready for it? He has to be an example, but an example has to be seen. Rupert's private life is disappearing tonight.

How about that? As of tonight, his life is an open book. Sorry, yours is too. But she's a Virginian, so it's no problem.

She was born for this. An open book. Now, you know the dangers of that. When your life becomes an open book. For people to see.

[15 : 12] People to watch. We call it the fishbowl in the United States. The pastor's fishbowl. It's not something he has on the counter. It's something that he is. You're looking at his life all the time. And he will be judged by standards that you will never be judged by.

You'll hold him to be almost perfect. It's not perfect to compare to anyone else, including yourself. And when that is the reality, that a minister of the gospel loses his private life, he can no longer say, I'm a public figure, but now I'm in my private life.

Don't try to get me to connect these two. This is what politicians do all the time, isn't it? I can be a good politician and have a terrible private life. Well, maybe you can, but I'll tell you this.

You cannot be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Have a great public life and a weak inner personal life. It just cannot happen. And the weak personal life is that which is now on display to the whole world.

And they will look and they will look and they will look and the temptation that will be faced by every minister of the gospel whose lives are being constantly scrutinized is the temptation of hypocrisy.

[16 : 26] To pretend to be something you aren't. To pretend to be better than you really are. This is why Jesus warns the Pharisees in his day who were, in fact, leaders of the people of God at that time.

Jesus acknowledged that. That their lives were just full of hypocrisy because they lived their lives for the sake of others to watch. Oh, it's true. Others will be watching.

But now, Rupert must never live his life for you to watch. Because here's a man who, above all, must, from the heart, be one who's related to Jesus and wants Jesus to examine his life.

Even sometimes to his public detriment. So, yes, here we find the writer of Chronicles moving from the practicalities to this lovely image of what it means to be a leader.

He's an example for all to follow. Now, those of you who are as old as me or older, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking exactly what I'm thinking. What kind of example can this young man be?

[17 : 35] What has he experienced that could make him exemplary for the rest of us? Well, begin to look. Begin to watch. Begin to pray. Because Holy Spirit can bring a wisdom, can bring a maturity, can bring a holiness to this young man's life.

Only Holy Spirit can do that that can actually astound you, astonish you at the idea that even someone a few years can become an exemplary leader for old people like me.

Wouldn't that be a great joy? But that's why he needs your prayers. Okay, so the chronicler goes from the superficial of practicalities to a little bit deeper, thinking in terms of, well, he's an example.

But now, one step deeper into the heart of David, a man who failed, but in the end succeeded. How did he do it? What was true of him? Take a look now at verse 10.

David actually succeeds in calling others to give their contributions to the temple, not by ordering them, but by showing example to them. But this is what happens then in verse 10 when he has such success.

[18 : 46] Therefore, David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said, blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. 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 on the earth is yours.

Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted above all. Both riches and honors 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.

And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. Another step deeper into the heart of David is simply this.

He was not about to take credit for what he had done. Do you know that several times in the writings of the Apostle Paul he talks about things that he had done.

I did this, I did that, but then he qualifies it with a little comma or a little parenthesis. Yet not I. Yet not I. Because he did not want people to have the false impression that he thought that he, as great as he was, as accomplished as he was as a missionary of Jesus was actually the one doing it.

[20 : 06] For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ in Rupert, the one who will be leading this church.

The power of Holy Spirit in the Christian leader is the one who is able to succeed the kind of man that David was here. And so, David was quick, even in public, not in private, because, oh, if he did that, then we'd all understand, but even in public to say, no, no, no, not me.

How was David able to do that? It's because David knew David. Every minister of the gospel who's here tonight knows themselves.

And as the years go by, it becomes increasingly evident to all of us, doesn't it, brothers, that it is not we who are doing this. Whatever successes we have in this world are purely and simply the grace and the mercy of God in us.

And this is the attitude that you must require. You must require it of your leaders. Now, when I was a young pastor and I began preaching week after week after week, as soon as I got in the car with my wife, do you know the first thing that came to my lips?

[21 : 32] It wasn't, isn't God good today? Boy, I sure am glad God did something really great today. I think maybe the Holy Spirit was actually at work in the service today.

That's not what I said to my wife. If she were here, I would ask her right now, Gina, what did I say? Because she could tell you. This is what I would say to her. How did I do? How did I do?

Was it good? Of course, the problem was she would always tell me the truth. Then we'd have the biggest argument of the whole week as to why my sermon was no good.

Every week it happened that way. until finally my wife said, Richard, you just have to stop asking that question of me because I'm going to tell you the truth about it. Because this is not about you and I am not going to allow you to look at yourself and say, didn't I do a good job today?

If we're going to be in this game called being a Christian leader, it's not going to be about you, Richard. That was a hard lesson to learn from my wife when I was 23 years old. But there's the reality.

[22 : 46] Now let me encourage you this way. I know you. I know Scott's enough to know this is the way you are. Just like with money, you are like this with compliments. Am I telling the truth now?

A little bit too close to home here? Because you don't want someone like Willie or someone like Rupert to get a big head, do you? You don't want them to explode with all this wonderful compliments you may lay on him.

But let me just tell you this. They need the encouragement of you telling them this was great. This really helped me. I was so encouraged.

They need you to tell them that. But then you watch and expect a man like Rupert to say, I thank God for that. I sure am glad that the Holy Spirit was working today.

I'm sure I'm glad that Christ did that for you today because it wasn't me. You won't believe it that pastors need the encouragement of their people to say thank you for serving Christ in this way.

[23 : 55] But then they need to reciprocate by saying, thanks be to God because everything I gave you today came to me from him.

It is not my doing but Christ in me. a step deeper into the leader from the practicalities to being an example to knowing where the power comes from to knowing where the gifts come from to knowing where the successes come from and not hesitating for a moment in public as David did here to thank God for the successes of the ministry.

one more step into the heart now deep into the heart of someone who knows what it means to be a Christian leader beginning in verse 14.

but who am I and what is my people that we should be able thus to offer willingly for all things come from you and from your hand we and from your own hand we've and from your own hand we've given you for we are strangers before you and sojourners as all our fathers were our days on the earth are like a shadow and there is nothing abiding O Lord our God all this abundance that we have provided for the building of the house for your holy name comes from your hand and all is your own I know my God that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things and now I have seen your people who are present here offering freely and joyously to you O Lord God of Abraham Isaac and Israel our fathers keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people and direct their hearts toward you grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments your testimonies and your statutes performing all that he may build a palace for which I have made provision what do we see here we see that in humility

David understands something that no minister wants to admit everything we do everything we accomplish can all go away tomorrow I hope you know that that's true in your own life sometimes you know things move along well and you feel like well nothing's ever going to change it's only going to be good upon good upon good but in a moment in a moment it can all go away and David knew that this was the case oh they were having a great day of celebration at this time in preparation for Solomon but he knew that the people needed to have this attitude in their hearts forever oh they were having a great day David was having a wonderful day praising God for what he had done but he knew it could all go away in the days of Solomon so what does he do he turns to the Lord his God and he pleads with him please give this to your people forever please strengthen

[27 : 08] Solomon that he may obey you because I know that everything I have done can go away tomorrow Rupert you're going to do magnificent things by the power of God's spirit you are but you don't want to do them just for your day the reality is you want something that will be for you yes your family yes your children yes your grandchildren yes your great-grandchildren on and on it goes for generations to come that's what we need from leaders but you know what they must be if they're going to be those kinds of leaders they must be people who constantly turn to the Lord Jesus and ask for his blessing on what they have done constant dependence every day every moment leaning on him and I hate to tell you this but usually the first thing that leaves a minister's life Rupert when he becomes ordained is prayer too busy to pray too busy to ask too busy to make sure things are secured by Christ but this is where he needs you because he needs you as the people of God to hold him up before God so that he will be a man of prayer do you remember

I told you at the very beginning that when you make your living from your faith you're always in danger of losing one or the other how can we avoid that by this wondrous passage where a man like David who failed so miserably can come off in the end as a successful faithful servant of God practical yes exemplary yes a man who gives praise to God for all that happens and a man who knows how utterly dependent he is on Jesus for the ministry that he serves let's pray together our Lord Jesus how we are delighted in you because there's no one who had a plan like yours there's no one who is more perfectly exemplary than you there's no one who offered praise and honor to the father like you did there's no one there's no one who depended moment by moment on the grace of the father in his life so we come to you now and pray for your blessing on this congregation and on Rupert and his family that by your holy spirit by your holy spirit a new day will come in his life and in the life of this church because of what you're doing tonight and as you do it we will praise you for it amen