

## Parental Examples

### The Two Sides of Fatherhood

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Let us start out this afternoon in John 20, verse 17. And before I read this verse, set the stage a little bit. At this point, in verse 17, we find that Christ has risen from the dead. He is about to ascend to heaven and Mary Magdalene has come to His tomb. She has found Jesus gone. Two angels are sitting there where Christ had lain, and after speaking to the angel, she turns and she finds Christ standing there. She does not know who it is at first. Once she realizes that it is Christ, she tries to hug Him.

**John 20:17** Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.'"

Not only has Jesus allowed Himself to be subjected to the horrible beatings and the crucifixion in order that we might have an intermediary between God and us, but immediately after His resurrection, He makes it clear that God is our Father as well. No selfishness on His part, no jealousy, no envy. He is not angry about the indignities He has suffered. He is not carrying some sort of grudge, but rather He is willing to share His Father with us. (I would like to thank Martin for his sermon Sabbath to set the stage for my sermonette.) But it is very clear here. He says, "My Father and your Father, My God and your God."

Well, during the Passover season, I am always struck by the selflessness of God the Father and of Jesus Christ. How God trusted Christ, the only other member of His Family at that time, the closest being to Him. He trusted Him to come to this earth on our behalf, and then Christ trusted God to restore to Him after His resurrection His former glory.

And I think sometimes about the contrast between our carnal human fathers and of course our spiritual Father. And the thought comes to me that what we

do speaks more loudly than what we say. When my kids were growing up, I did as most fathers I am sure. I tried to teach them about honesty and loyalty, obedience, and so on. But had I not strived to be those things myself, they would have lost faith in me. They might have used any bad examples of mine as excuses for their own failings.

Now God has made Himself available to us as our Father in heaven. Jesus Christ made that possible, and sits now at His right hand as our Elder Brother. We have Their perfect examples to follow. We do not have to depend on the imperfect examples of our own earthly fathers or any other role models in our lives. But let us face it, we see these physical examples more clearly more often than we do perhaps sometimes the spiritual and they impact us greatly, these physical examples do. As fathers, as parents, we represent Christ to our children. Very simply, we either provide a positive, godly example or a carnal and worldly one.

With the time I have today, I want to go to a small section of I Chronicles and I want to look at examples of both sides of fatherhood, the good and the bad.

**I Chronicles 20:4-8** Now it happened afterward that war broke out at Gezer with the Philistines, at which time Sibbechai the Hushathite killed Sippai, who was one of the sons of the giant. [If your Bible is like mine, in the margin for the word giant, you have Rapha.] And they were subdued. Again there was war with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. Yet again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, with twenty-four fingers and toes, six on each hand, six on each foot; he was also born to the giant [in the margin, Rapha]. So when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. These were born to the giant in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

Now about this giant in Gath, this man Rapha, the Bible commentators are all over the place. Many do not even think he was a person, but rather a race of giants. Others think that these giants were the remnants of the Anakim or the Rephaim or the Nephilim and are not literally brothers. Well, this

intrigued me, and I will admit that I spent way too much time researching what was a very minor point, I think, only to find that there was no agreement among scholars about this.

The verses here in I Chronicles and the parallel account in II Samuel 21 lead me to believe that it is just as we read it. The Interlinear Bible shows that the original Hebrew says, "Sons of Rapha [sometimes with an h at the end]." And they link it to *Strong's Concordance*, which gives this as a man's name. I think very simply that it is as it says here, these men were brothers. They were giants, sons of Rapha, himself a giant. Starting with Goliath and ending with the individual with the six fingers, these sons of Rapha fought with Israel, and they all died. Now I assume that Goliath was the oldest because of the order of events. There is no need to turn to I Samuel 17. We all know the story of David and Goliath. But I will read verse 33 to you.

**I Samuel 17:33** Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him [speaking of Goliath]; for you are but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

Goliath had been trained from an early age to fight, to kill. We can easily imagine his father Rapha instilling in his boys, at least four of them, a hatred of Israel, teaching them to be men of war.

Now think about the impact Goliath's death had on the Philistines and more specifically on the family of Rapha. To me this would have been a chance for this father to step in and tell his sons that a change was called for. That it was obvious a God stronger than his god was working here. I mean, that such a youth as David could kill Goliath was obviously a miracle. And Rapha at that point could have saved the lives of his other sons, but he did not.

These sons of Rapha were not all killed in the same battle or even the same war. If you paid attention as I read it earlier, it would say *again* there was war. So after each death, after each one of his sons died, Rapha could have provided to his remaining sons an example of humility. I can picture him perhaps calling a family council after the death of the first one or the second one, even the third. I do not know how many children he had. He could have said, "Sons, it's become obvious that we are dealing with a God mightier

than our own. And we are going to have to work with these people, not against them." But he did not do that. And so each son was killed in turn.

Now the sons themselves, each one could have made a decision of their own. They were adults. Each one of those sons could have decided to follow another course, but they did not either.

Let us go to the next chapter of I Chronicles and look at a different example of fatherhood. Now at I Chronicles 21 we find King David taking a census of Israel. This angered God and God sent a plague (verse 14) that killed 70,000 men. Now we do not know if this is the sum total of the casualties. I mean, were women and children dying as well? Was this strictly the total of the men? It is hard to say, but at least 70,000 died. Look at what 9/11 did to the psyche of the Americans, and we lost 3,000. It is hard to imagine 70,000 at least dying.

**I Chronicles 21:15** And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the Lord looked and relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who was destroying, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

**I Chronicles 21:18-23** Therefore, the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. So David went up at the word of Gad, which he had spoken in the name of the Lord. Now Ornan turned and saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him hid themselves, but Ornan continued threshing wheat. Then David came to Ornan, and Ornan looked up and saw David. And he went out from the threshing floor, and bowed down before David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, "Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar on it to the Lord. You shall grant it to me at the full price, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." But Ornan said to David, "Take it to yourself, and let my Lord the king do what is good in his eyes. Look, I also will give you the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing implements for wood, and the wheat for the grain offering; I give it all."

Now first reading this, you might think the same thing that I did. On the one hand, Ornan seems unperturbed by the appearance of an angel. It says he continued threshing wheat, and yet when he sees King David, he is the picture of humility. Well, there is no consistency, and that bothered me, but it turns out that verse 20 is a bad translation. I remember reading this years ago and thinking that Ornan was disrespectful to God's representative, maybe even a bit fearless. But again from the Interlinear it says in the original Hebrew the phrase is "continued not." He was threshing wheat. He and his sons saw the angel, and Ornan continued not. And then in the flow of the story, David shows up right after that, and we do see how humble he was because he went right out and put his face to the ground, bowing down.

Now Ornan was a Jebusite. This was a people descended from Jebus, a son of Canaan. Their homeland was in and around Jerusalem. When the children of Israel came into the Promised Land, they did conquer the Jebusites, but they did not eradicate them. And actually, what happened was that when they did not eradicate them, they consolidated around Jerusalem and that became their capital, that was their city. And they felt that Jerusalem was impregnable and it was left up to David hundreds of years later to take the city of Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, they thought the city was so invincible that they told David that even their blind and lame could defend it. That was in I Samuel 5:6. And David took the city.

Ornan was descended from royalty. Some commentators call him a prince. He may well have been one of those that taunted the army of King David. I do not know. But as a member of the royal family, you would think that he would have been captured, imprisoned, perhaps even executed. Yet here we find him threshing wheat with his sons on land that he owns right outside Jerusalem. Land that would later see the Temple built on it.

Now his people had been at war with Israel just as the Philistines had, just as the family of Rapha was for hundreds of years, generation after generation at war with Israel. They were enemies. The difference is that at some point Ornan realized that the God of Israel was truly God. We do not know if he ever was called, so to speak, or that he actually worshipped God, but we do

know that he understood who God was and that David was His chosen ruler. And here we see him in this example. He is now a willing subject of Israel and its king.

It is interesting too that he also knew what was needed in order to offer a sacrifice, and he offered it to King David. He did not raise his sons, who would also be royalty, to fight Israel, to hate Israel. Now we do not know about earlier. We do not know how much time has elapsed in this situation, but at least at this point in time he has had a change of heart.

And when the angel of the Lord appeared on Mount Moriah at Ornan's threshing floor, his sons hid themselves. Ornan stopped, at the very least, what he was doing and tried to ascertain the situation. He then sees King David. He comes out immediately and he bows to the ground and he tries to give the threshing floor to David, along with all the tools: wood for the fire and the oxen and the grain for offerings. Quite a contrast with Rapha, who in effect gave his sons up as offerings to his own pagan gods by continually throwing them up against Israel. That is what he did, and they all died.

Now we do not know how old Ornan's sons were at this point. They were old enough to be out working with him. Teenagers, I think at least, perhaps adults at this point. Old enough to make decisions of their own as to the examples that they are going to follow. Ornan's four boys were very privileged in the example, the good example they were given to emulate. Rapha's sons were not as privileged. Of course, they could have taken another path. They were adults, each of them, men of war, capable of making their own way in life. They chose the wrong path, they died. Ornan's sons chose the right path, they lived. It is very clear cut.

You might say that removing leavening from our lives is nothing more than simply taking the right path at all times.

So other than being an interesting story, or at least it was to me, what does this mean to us? I have three quick points to end with here.

First of all, as parents, our verbal lessons are important. They are very important, but it is critical that we live the life we preach.

Second of all, if you think about it, we were all children at one point in our lives. For some of us, the memory is a little further back than others, but we were all children at some point in our lives. As we grew out of childhood, as we matured, as we became accountable for our actions, we had to evaluate the model that was given to us by our parents and other adults. To say we had a bad upbringing, to use that as a crutch of some sort, to say that we are doing only what we were taught, that is not an acceptable excuse. It is not going to suffice.

And third, these things also apply spiritually. Our Father and our Elder Brother are perfect role models, and they have given us words of wisdom, but they have also backed them up with perfect examples.

So we are not to be as Rapha and his sons, but rather like Ornan and his sons. As parents, we set good examples. As children, we evaluate and make good choices. And at the bottom of it all, we always have the perfect example of our Father to guide us.