

Duty 2 Samuel 18:1-8

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-26-2014

Introduction – What does duty mean?

A. If David didn't want to fight against Absalom (see vv. 5,33; 19:1-8), why did he do so?

When David fought against his son in this chapter, he was engaging in a *very uncomfortable* duty. We've already seen that David really did not want to fight this battle. In verse 5 he asks the whole army to go easy on his son. He does not want his son dead. In verse 33 he is so deeply distressed when he hears that his son was killed that he wishes that he had died instead of his son and goes into almost inconsolable mourning. In fact, he almost loses his sense of duty to country and almost loses his throne over it in chapter 19. He really did not want to fight Absalom. So \$100 question is, why did he do it?

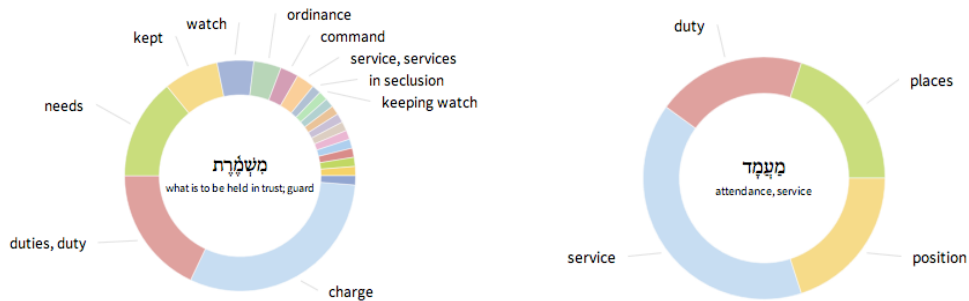
He did it because of a heightened sense of duty. And I will point out that David had this heightened sense of duty throughout his life. He felt duty to his king when he served under Saul. He felt duty to his country when he continued to fight for his country as a banished citizen. He felt duty to his men even when they treated him badly. When you study his whole life from the perspective of the two Hebrew words for duty, you see that he was an incredible model of what the grace of duty is all about. It was a sense of duty that made David pour out the water that his soldiers had brought to him at great risk to their lives. Now, they may have initially been confused by the fact that he didn't drink it, but a sense of duty to his men absolutely required him to do that. It was a sign of his great respect for his men just as their bringing the water was a sign of great respect for him.

And now in this chapter, it was a heightened sense of duty that made David fight against Absalom even while he was hoping upon hope that he could preserve Absalom's life – not his kingship, but his life. He fought because as a God-appointed king he had a duty to God and nation. You see, Absalom was not a legitimate king, was lawless, and would have brought absolute disaster upon the nation if he had been allowed to rule. So David needed to protect his nation against Absalom's lawlessness. He knew that.

© Copyright 2014 by Phillip G. Kayser. Permission is granted to individuals to download, print, or distribute this sermon on paper or electronically, provided that each reprint bears this copyright notice, current address, and telephone number, and provided that all such reproductions are distributed without charge. They may not be sold or issued in book form, CD-ROM form, or microfiche without prior permission. All rights reserved.

Phillip G. Kayser • Dominion Covenant Church • 307.N 41st Ave. Omaha, NE 68131 • 402.934.3300

B. Nuances of מִשְׁמֶרֶת and מַעֲמָד – chart; Other dictionary entries: An inward impulse to fulfill a stewardship “held in trust,” “duty,” “obligation,” “to be devoted to a task or an office,” “required stance,” “place in life,” “to remain true to your calling,” “faithful to an agreement,” “charge to be kept,” or “a sense of moral obligation” to do something.



If you look in your outlines, you will see the dictionary definitions of the two Hebrew words for duty (מִשְׁמֶרֶת and מַעֲמָד), and other dictionaries say that these words for duty have these nuances: An inward impulse to fulfill a stewardship “held in trust,” “duty,” “obligation,” “to be devoted to a task or an office,” “required stance,” “place in life,” “to remain true to your calling,” “faithful to an agreement,” “charge to be kept,” or “a sense of moral obligation” to do something.

When we speak of duty, we are not simply speaking of a task that someone wants us to do. That’s almost a misuse of the term “duty.” We could grudgingly do a task and not have a lick of this true sense of Christian duty. The two Hebrew words for duty are speaking of a deep compulsion to do the right thing - the thing that we are either morally obligated to do or legally required to do. And this sense of duty sometimes makes us do things that others might consider rather odd, but upon reflection, they are things that others will honor. Let me give you an example:

C. Illustrations

You’ve maybe heard of the angel at Fredericksburg. During that battle in the War Between the States, Confederate Sergeant Richard Kirkland, of the 2nd South Carolina, just couldn’t stand to hear the moaning of the wounded Union Soldiers whom they had mown down earlier in the day and who were crying for water, and no Union soldiers could bring them water. This 19-year-old sergeant approached Brigadier General Joseph Kershaw, CSA, to ask permission to go out onto the field and give them some water

and perhaps medical attention. Initially hesitant, the General finally acquiesced, refusing however to allow the white flag that would ensure safety. Well, despite the danger, Kirkland jumped over the stone wall with water canteens and sprinted towards the wounded Union soldiers. At first, the Federals shot at him as he dodged back and forth with water canteens banging on his front and sides. But as soon as they realized that he was unarmed and bringing water, they quit shooting. And as they witnessed him offering water to one enemy soldier after another, cheers began to ring out all along the lines of Union soldiers, and he became known as the Angel of Marye's Heights. After he emptied his canteens, he crossed back to safety and resumed his duties of killing Federal soldiers. I know – it seems weird.

So there was a man who was hugely conflicted between two urges that sprang from duty. He had a higher sense of duty to his own country, but with no one caring for the moaning Union soldiers, he also had a sense of duty to humanity; a duty to be humane to the suffering enemy.

And we see a similar conflict going on in David's heart. It's easy to be critical of David, and I will criticize him when we get to verse 33 as he lapses from duty. But I think in these verses he is showing the complicated urges of duty to country and loyalty to family at the same time. In fact, duty is so complicated, and it is so essential to having a balanced Christian life, that I want to quote at length from a speech that General Douglas MacArthur gave at West Point in 1962. I think this summarizes the importance of this subject so well. The whole speech is amazing, but I'm just going to quote a little section. And I want you to try to process each phrase in your mind. Your mind might be tempted to wander as I read, and you may be tempted initially to think that his speech is nothing but exaggeration, but hopefully by the end of the sermon you will realize that he was absolutely right. Near the beginning of the speech he said,

Duty, Honor, Country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying points: to build courage when courage seems to fail; to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith; to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.

Unhappily, I possess neither that eloquence of diction, that poetry of imagination, nor that brilliance of metaphor to tell you all that they mean.

The unbelievers will say they are but words, but a slogan, but a flamboyant phrase. Every pedant, every demagogue, every cynic, every hypocrite, every troublemaker, and I am sorry to say, some others of an entirely different character, will try to downgrade them even to the extent of mockery and ridicule.

But these are some of the things they do: They build your basic character. They mold you for your future roles as the custodians of the nation's defense. They make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid. They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for actions, not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm but to have compassion on those who fall; to master yourself before you seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; to reach into the future yet never neglect the past; to be serious yet never to take yourself too seriously; to be modest so that you will remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength. They give you a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions, a freshness of the deep springs of life, a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity, of an appetite for adventure over love of ease. They create in your heart the sense of wonder, the unfailing hope of what next, and the joy and inspiration of life. They teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman.

Why did firemen rush into the Twin Towers to try to save more people, full knowing the danger that was there? There was a sense of honor, duty, and of calling. Why did men willingly go and die in such faraway places as Verdun, the Ardennes Forest, Pearl Harbor, Tawara, “Pork Chop Hill,” DaNang, and Baghdad? And we won’t today get into whether these were good wars or bad wars – you know my views on that. But I’m talking about the heroic sense of duty that motivated these men to do what they thought to be right. While cynics are throwing off the need for duty, honor, and true patriotism, Christians can begin to stand in the gap. And there is a huge, huge gap. But I am convinced that Christians will not stand in the gap until God gives the church at large this grace of duty.

I. David exemplifies duty under God (vv. 1-5)

A. The God-centered nature of David’s sense of duty (Ps. 26,37,63,143)

And that’s where I want to start – that this really is a God-given grace. There are four Psalms written during this period that show that David was able to hold to this sense of duty only because he trusted in God and was driven by a vision of what God wanted for him. It was God who put that urge within him to be faithful. Psalm 37 is probably the strongest of the Psalms that describe this sense of duty that God had instilled within David. There is a lot that could be said from that Psalm. But the other Psalms listed in your outlines have hints of it as well. In Psalm 26 he says, “I have walked

in my integrity; I have also trusted in the LORD; I shall not slip.” And he later repeats his determination to do the right thing as he depends on God’s grace to do so. And because of lack of time, I will leave it to you to dig into the Psalms listed in your outlines – especially Psalm 37.

But it is so important that we teach our children to enter into this grace by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, by faith in what Christ has provided, and to the glory of God the Father. We do not want to instill a humanistic sense of duty, or humanists will easily manipulate it. This must be a sense of duty that is 100% a servant to Christ. Peter T. Forsythe was correct when he said, “The first duty of every soul is to find not its freedom but its Master.”¹ And Christ must be the master of all of our urges to duty, or they will get us in trouble, like they did some of King Saul’s men. And when duty flows from the throne of grace, these other points will follow.

B. Duty serves despite the odds (v. 1a)

Verse 1 shows that David held to duty despite the fact that the odds of success were against him. Verse 1 says,

“And David numbered the people who were with him...”

And the verse goes on to make it quite clear that David did not do that to make himself confident, but to figure out how best to divide the troops under the leaders. If anything, the numbering of these soldiers could have made him less confident. When we get to verse 3 we will see a hint that there were approximately 20,000 troops that had defected to David by this time. But what is 20,000 against the hundreds of thousands in Absalom’s army? In fact, if we take Hushai’s speech in chapter 17 seriously, and if we take seriously the three references to “all Israel” fighting against David (17:11,13; 17:17), then there could well have been over one million men in Absalom’s army up against David’s twenty thousand. What made David take a stand against such odds? Duty and a trust in God.

And if the Spartan King, Leonidas, could have a pagan duty that would enable him to stand against Persia’s massive army, we need to pray that God would give to us a true divine sense of duty to be able to take a stand in the face of overwhelming odds. In fact, I like what one of Leonidas’ soldiers was purported to have said. In 480 B.C. an envoy came from the Persian king telling Leonidas that it was futile to try to fight the Persian army. The envoy said, “Our archers are so numerous that the flight of their

¹ Quoted by Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991, p. 22.

arrows darkens the sun.” And a soldier by the name of Dienece immediately replied, “So much the better, for we shall fight them in the shade.”² Leonidas and his 300 men took their stand and died defending their country. But it is really sad to me that a pagan is a greater example of heroism in duty than most American Christians are. The least resistance from the lust of their flesh, and many Christian men (and now we are seeing even many Christian pastors) will give in. They have no sense of duty, honor, marriage. The least inconvenience in the church, and many look elsewhere. They have no sense of duty, honor, church. When the odds in America’s culture wars seem too large for us to make a difference, we abandon any attempt to stem the tide. There is no sense of duty, honor, country.

There should be a deep God-given urge to take your stand for God just as David did in the forest of Ephraim. Whatever your calling from God might be, Satan will tempt you to abandon duty and to do what comes easier. And whether your calling is “duty, honor, job,” “duty, honor, family,” “duty, honor, marriage,” “duty, honor, church,” or “duty, honor, country,” ask God to give you *divine* commitment to take your stand even if it doesn’t seem like you will be successful.

C. Duty calls us to uncomfortable leadership (vv. 1b-2a)

The text goes on to say,

2Sam. 18:1 And David numbered the people who *were* with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.

2Sam. 18:2 Then David sent out one third of the people under the hand of Joab, one third under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab’s brother, and one third under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, “I also will surely go out with you myself.”

Duty sometimes calls us to uncomfortable leadership. And despite the bad testimony of his son (and I’m sure there were people talking about that), and despite the discomfort of fighting his son, David showed great leadership. He is called king five times in this passage, and he acts like a king. He sets captains in place. He organizes a new army. He divides the army into three parts. He numbers the people, and apportions them under leaders. And he does all of this diligently to take a stand against his son. This

² Different wordings can be seen at different sites: See <http://shadeofarrows.webs.com/battleofthermopylae.htm>
<http://300spartanwarriors.com/battleofthermopylae/the300spartiates.html>
<http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/weaponswar/p/blpwtherm.htm>

is what qualifies him to be such a great king – he did not allow personal feelings to get in the way of duty.

Elders sometimes have to do uncomfortable things. Fathers sometimes have to do uncomfortable things. But their office of father compels them to fulfill their duty to God rather than to be comfortable. Godly magistrates sometimes have to lead in uncomfortable ways.

One modern leader whom I think is a tremendous model of this point is the Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, Judge Roy Moore. Years ago, a Federal judge (Judge Thompson) told Chief Justice Moore that he could no longer acknowledge God in his court room. Moore insisted that such a mandate was unconstitutional. Thompson didn't even have the jurisdiction to make that mandate. He pointed out that God is acknowledged in the Alabama constitution (which he was sworn to defend), and in the Declaration of Independence, and in a huge body of state and federal court law precedents that simply could not be ignored. He said that Thompson's mandate violated history, law, court precedence, jurisdiction, conscience, and a huge body of law. In any case, to make a long story short, a scurrilous Republican Attorney General (who professes to be Christian, by the way) held an impeachment trial, and Judge Moore ended up being impeached. But they refused to look at any of the legal evidence that was presented, and defaulted to saying that it was unethical for Moore to disobey Thompson's mandate. That's all they were interested in talking about – as if Thompson had any jurisdiction in Alabama's courts. It was a Kangaroo court. And the irony was that the very court that impeached him for acknowledging God opened with prayer and swore in judges with the words, "So help me God." I've watched video clips, and it's one of the strangest oddities I have ever seen. At one point in the trial, the Attorney General, Bill Pryor, questioned Chief Justice Moore asking,

Q: Mr. Chief Justice? And your understanding is that the federal court ordered that you could not acknowledge God; isn't that right?

A: Yes.

Q: And if you resume your duties as Chief Justice after this proceeding, you will continue to acknowledge God as you have testified that you would today?

A: That's right.

Q: No matter what any official says?

A: Absolutely. Without - let me clarify that. Without an acknowledgement of God, I cannot do my duties. I must acknowledge God. It says so in the

constitution of Alabama. It says so in the first amendment to the United States Constitution. It says so in everything I have read. So—

[And he get's interrupted.] Q: The only point I'm trying to clarify, Mr. Chief Justice, is not why, but only that, in fact, if you do resume your duties as Chief Justice, you will continue to do that [acknowledge God] without regard to what any other official says; isn't that right?

A: Well, I'll do the same thing this court did with starting a prayer; that's an acknowledgement of God. Now, we did the same thing that justices do when they place their hand on the Bible and say, "So help me God." It's an acknowledgement of God. The Alabama Supreme Court opened with, "God save the State and this Honorable Court." It's an acknowledgement of God. In my opinion, which I have written many opinions, acknowledging God is the source—a moral source of law. I think you must.

Three times the Attorney General asked him if he was willing to repent of disobeying a Federal judge (and repent is a strange choice of terms when you don't want to acknowledge God or ten commands). But anyway, when he refused to "repent" of acknowledging God, he was deposed from office. It was very stressful, but throughout the whole ordeal, he upheld his oath of office, his duty to the Alabama constitution, and his Christian duty to God; and he did so with courage and conviction. And it was so satisfying to have him once again reelected by the people to the office of Chief Justice. It was such an "in your face" statement to the Federal courts that I clapped my hands when I heard it. But in so many areas of life, being a leader will require a courageous commitment to leadership such as Justice Moore demonstrated.

Here are some other statements that Chief Justice Moore made in 2003.

- "To deny God would be to recognize man as sovereign and would be a violation of the first commandment as well as the First Amendment. Judge Thompson's order, running counter to the Supreme Judge of the World, is null and void."

Brothers and sisters, we need more office holders with this kind of commitment to duty.

- He also said in 2003, "The law of God will remain forever. This case is ... about the acknowledgement of God. Indeed, we must acknowledge God because our constitution says our justice system is established by God. For

him to say that I can't say who God is, is to disestablish the justice system of this state.

- "I will not violate my oath, I cannot forsake my conscience, I will not neglect my duty, and I will never deny the God upon whom our laws and country depend."

- "Acknowledging God is the source, a moral source of law."

- Upon his removal from office in 2003, he said, "God is sovereign and shall remain so despite what the Supreme Court and the federal courts of this land say. I have obeyed the rule of law by not following the unlawful dictates of man."

- And then upon being sworn back into office a few years ago he said, "We've got to remember that most of what we do in court comes from some Scripture or is backed by Scripture."

Praise God that Chief Justice Moore clung to a heightened sense of duty despite vilification and slander in the media, despite threats to his office and family, and despite enormous pressures from every quarter. Duty frequently calls us to uncomfortable leadership. Are you men up to the task? Are you training your families to stand strong in this same calling to duty? You must. If our nation is to have any hope of survival, you must. And even if it doesn't survive, if you are to have a part in rebuilding it from the ashes, you must instill this sense of duty to calling in the next generation.

D. Duty is inherently self-sacrificial (v. 2b)

And this brings up the next point – duty is inherently self-sacrificial. Look at the last sentence of verse 2: “And the king said to the people, “I also will surely go out with you myself.” He wasn't asking others to do what he himself was unwilling to do. He was willing to die in the cause of defending his country. And so this God-given urge is something we should pray for our children if they are to rise above selfishness, laziness, apathy, and other non-sacrificial sins. This self-sacrificial grace breaks through those fleshly issues. A heightened sense of duty is part of the answer.

E. One of the twin graces of duty is humility

1. A willingness to listen (vv. 3-4)

The fourth characteristic is that one of the twin graces of duty is humility. Verses 3-4.

2Sam. 18:3 But the people answered, “You shall not go out! For if we flee away, they will not care about us; nor if half of us die, will they care about us. But *you are* worth ten thousand of us now. For you are now more help to us in the city.”

2Sam. 18:4 Then the king said to them, “Whatever seems best to you I will do.” So the king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands.

Where pride looks only to what will benefit our ego, duty is willing to do the right thing even if you will be misunderstood and even if others will get the glory. David, like any he-man, would rather be out there in the field, but in verses 3-4 we see a willingness to listen to others. We should have the humility to listen to others. And ultimately it is God whom we must be hearing. Albert Barnes wrote,

One of the evidences of conversion is a desire to be instructed in the doctrines and duties of [Christianity] and a willingness to attend the preaching and teaching of [God's Word]. A healthy Christian is hungry for Holy Spirit inspired teachings and he makes time to be exposed to it.³

He is willing to listen. Any duty that is arrogant is a counterfeit sense of duty.

2. A willingness to take the back seat in the interests of the country (vv. 3-4)

The second evidence that his sense of duty was a humble duty was that he was willing to take a back seat in the interests of the country.

3. Honoring the sacrifices of others (v. 4b)

And the third evidence of humility was a willingness to honor the sacrifices of others. David stood as these men went out by rank. He was honoring them. Duty made him realize that it's more about the needs of the people as a whole than it is about his wants and his own desires. And so he let the body work on his behalf even as he did his best to work on their behalf. God-given duty is not so prideful that it will only serve and not be served. A God-given sense of duty is humble enough to serve without

³ Quoted by Terry Laughlin at <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/illustrations-about-prayer-breaking-bread-teaching.asp>

recognition and to be served even when you cannot pay people back. It would have been humbling for David to be back with the women and children. But from the Psalms he wrote during this period we know that he prayed his heart out for his men.

F. Duty is often in painful conflict with other deep desires and loyalties (v. 5)

But verse 5 shows that duty is often in painful conflict with other deep desires and loyalties. We've obviously been talking about this already, but let's go ahead and read verse 5:

2Sam. 18:5 Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, "*Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.*" And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom.

Lord willing, we'll return to this verse next week to explain what was wrong with Joab's actions. But here it is painfully evident that David's desires concerning his son were in conflict with his duty to country, and his duty to country forced him to fight and risk his son's death. Whenever I disciplined my children, I had one part of me that really didn't want to do it, because I hated to see them cry. But my higher duty to my office of father under God made me try to be consistent in fulfilling my duty. Your duty to your husband may conflict with your feelings about your husband sometimes. Your duty to your job may put you into a conflict of soul that requires you to go to God and ask Him what you should do. But if you don't already have a strong sense of duty, you will likely do the wrong thing.

I read a wonderful story where a child's duty to his father caused him to potentially face the wrath of the Duke of Wellington. Nashua Cavalier tells the story of the Duke of Wellington leading a hunting party in England. And he came to a large property where a boy was standing at the gate. The Duke demanded that he open the gate to let the hunting party through. And the boy said, "I'm sorry sir, but my father sent me to say that you must not hunt on his grounds."

The Duke answered gruffly, "Do you know who I am?"

No, sir," the boy answered meekly.

"I am the Duke of Wellington."

The boy took off his cap to honor the Duke, but he still did not open the gate. Instead, the boy quietly said, "The Duke of Wellington will not ask me to disobey my father's orders."

To which the Duke slowly took off his hat, smiled, and said, “I honor the boy who is faithful to his duty.” Now, that was an uncomfortable duty. It was a tough place to be in. But the boy remained firm, and Wellington’s party rode away.

G. Duty is sometimes in conflict with the country we love (v. 6a)

The last thing I wanted to highlight from David’s own duty was that duty sometimes comes in conflict with the country we love. If your highest loyalty is to the state, and your duty cannot see any higher than the state, then you have a counterfeit, idolatrous duty, not a God-given sense of duty. Verse 6 begins:

2Sam. 18:6 So the people went out into the field of battle against Israel.

David is the king of Israel, but he is fighting against Israel. He is duty bound before God to fight against Israel. And there are times like that today when we must metaphorically fight against “Israel” out of love for “Israel.” How do you apply that? Well, we could apply it literally to resisting collectivism in the culture wars of America. People may think that we are not being loyal, but we really are the true patriots when we stand for God, constitution, and liberty. It may be uncomfortable at times, but if our country asks us to violate duty to our heavenly Father, like that boy in his interaction with the Duke of Wellington, we must stand fast by our duty.

But we could also apply it to how we handle a member of the family that has gone astray. Tough love must sometimes take tough actions, and it is duty to God that calls for those actions. I know that Rodney feels terrible for having to exercise tough love with Zia as he rules his family, but I honor him because he has done the right thing. I really do think that he has fulfilled an elder’s call to rule his family. Now, I can understand a sabbatical while he is helping his family to regroup, and Gary and I will respect whatever decision he makes down the road. I’m not trying to pressure him. But I believe he has been a role model of “honor, duty, family” and of “honor, duty, church.” And I believe every one of us has a duty to pray for the Swabs and other families in our midst who have huge emotional conflict as they have done the right thing by their family members. May God prosper their efforts.

Let’s apply it to business. When I was in seminary, the wife of one of the seminary students was helping to put her husband through school by working at a medical equipment facility. It was a great job that brought in a lot of income, but she had a crisis presented to her. She was asked by her

boss to sign off on a large run of contaminated equipment (and I forget now if it was syringes, test tubes, or what it was), but this equipment had failed her quality control, and had failed pretty miserably. She felt bad for the boss, but told him that this batch had clearly failed the objective standards, and showed him how and where. He insisted that if she didn't sign off on it (which could have easily gotten her in trouble with the law), she would be fired. She said that she would be legally guilty and morally guilty if she signed off on it, and asked him to change his mind, but he would not hear any excuses. Here was a situation where her call to duty before God and country transcended her loyalty to job, and she couldn't do it. So there are lots of applications that you can make of this point.

II. David's men are inspired to duty under God (vv. 3-8)

A. David's lifetime of heroic duty inspires them to self-sacrificial duty (v. 3)

But I want to quickly point out that it's not just leaders like David who should be driven by this God-given sense of duty. *Every* Christian should. In fact, until the populace as a whole regains a heightened sense of self-sacrificing duty, it is unlikely that we will turn this country around. At least the church must become salty once again. John Foster Dulles said,

"Freedom and duty always go hand in hand and if the free do not accept the duty of social responsibility, they will not long remain free."⁴

It is because the church has abandoned its duty to be salt and light that (as Matthew 5 words it) we are useless salt that is only fit to be cast out and trampled underfoot of men. The church's lack of duty makes it no surprise whatsoever that Christians are the tail and humanists dominate. We are under their feet. Let me read his statement again:

"Freedom and duty always go hand in hand and if the free do not accept the duty of social responsibility, they will not long remain free.

And it's not just in politics that this is important. Nor is *Semper Fi* (forever faithful) just important for the Marines. Martin Luther rightly said,

The maid who sweeps kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays, not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.

⁴ John Foster Dulles, as quoted in, Bob Kelly, *Worth Repeating*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), p. 126.

The call to duty is to stay faithful to every task that God has called us to and to do it faithfully as unto the Lord. And when we do that, even the giving of a cup of cold water to one of these little ones will by no means lose God's reward. Christ guaranteed it. Sometimes it is actually harder to stay faithful to duty in a support-role of changing diapers and teaching children than it is on the front lines of the battlefield. God will use faithfulness to duty wherever it is manifested. And in this chapter David's lifetime of heroic duty inspired his own men to have sacrificial duty. Verse 3 again:

2Sam. 18:3 But the people answered, "You shall not go out! For if we flee away, they will not care about us; nor if half of us die, will they care about us. But *you are* worth ten thousand of us now. For you are now more help to us in the city." They knew the odds that they were up against. The New American Commentary points out that the literal Hebrew says,

"Even if half of us die, they won't care; for now there are ten thousand like us."

And then it comments

Though more obscure, the traditional Hebrew reading suggests that even in the event of a battlefield rout, David would have ten thousand troops he could still use to mount a further attack against Absalom.

In other words, even if half of them were killed, there would still be 10,000 of them left. Well, mathematically, if half is ten thousand, then the total number who had defected to David was twenty thousand. So they knew that the odds were against them. They knew full well what they were doing. They shared David's willingness to sacrifice himself for his country. It's almost like it has been infectious. They were inspired to duty. And we can inspire our children to duty by reading great missionary biographies, great war stories, stories of faithful women and children, and modeling duty ourselves.

B. They too are willing to go out against the odds (v. 4)

C. They will later follow David's orders at great discomfort (v. 5-6 with vv. 11-12; 19:2-3)

They too will later imitate David's duty at great discomfort by obeying David's orders to go easy on Absalom and disobeying Joab's orders. Like Joab, they probably don't think it is a good idea, and they know that disobeying Joab could make it tough for them, but their sense of duty made them willing to risk Joab's wrath in disobeying him in order to fulfill their duty to the true chain of command. Just to anticipate next week, if you look down at verses 11-12:

2Sam. 18:11 So Joab said to the man who told him, “You just saw *him!* And why did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have given you ten *shekels* of silver and a belt.”

2Sam. 18:12 But the man said to Joab, “Though I were to receive a thousand *shekels* of silver in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king’s son. For in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, ‘Beware lest anyone *touch* the young man Absalom!’

They may not have agreed with David’s wanting to be soft on Absalom, but since they were not being asked to sin in doing so, they too showed obedience to duty despite discomfort. And so verse 6 says,

2Sam. 18:6 So the people went out into the field of battle against Israel. And the battle was in the woods of Ephraim.

And because I have already dealt with most of these points under David, I won’t amplify hugely. But I will repeat that duty is something that we should instill in our children when they are quite young. Everything they do should be done as unto the Lord with the same seriousness as David’s duty. In a letter that has apparently been shown to be misattributed to Robert E. Lee, someone said,

Duty then is the sublimest word in our language. Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less.

Without a heightened sense of duty, police departments will become a menace rather than a comfort. Corruption appears to be going deep in the Washington DC police department, where two officers were caught dealing in child trafficking and child pornography. And one of the police officers was immediately shot, apparently in an attempt to cover something up in the police department, and the other one is in safe keeping. But that is the direction our country is headed if we lose this sense of duty. As our country becomes more and more pagan, these Christian concepts of duty, honor, justice, and integrity will become more and more things of the past, and you will not be able to count on any department of government to be faithful to duty. But the same will be true in marriages, contracts, jobs, and really, every area of life. We are in a crisis situation, and we’ve got to do everything that we can to reverse it. The U.S. News and World Report gave the following statistics on cheating in high school and colleges.⁵ And I quote these just to illustrate where our country is headed when Christian concepts like duty are lost.

⁵ <http://www.caveon.com/resources/cheating-statistics/>

- In one massive study, 75% of college students admitted to cheating.
- 85% of college students said that cheating was necessary to get ahead.

In another study that had a much smaller sampling of only 1,800 students from nine state universities,

- 70% of the students admitted to cheating on exams (only 5% less than the larger study) and
- 84% admitted to cheating on written assignments.

Any society that loses this inward urge to duty, honor, and faithfulness will become a backward country, like most third world countries are. It is one of the essential ingredients of a Christian civilization. It must be restored.

III. The duty is ours, the results are God's (vv. 6-8)

But let me end by pointing out how verses 6-8 show that though the duty is ours, the results are in God's hands, and Christians should be content for it to be that way. I've divided this up into two points with the label coming from a quote from Oliver Cromwell. He was campaigning in Ireland, and when his troops were about to cross a river, he said, "Put your trust in God, but mind to keep your powder dry." (And he was referring to gunpowder). And his quote is usually shortened to "trust God and keep your powder dry." He was telling them that trust in God never makes us careless in duty. The two go hand in hand. And I think this is a great way to end the sermon.

A. "Trust God..." (faith)

First, God was calling them to put their trust in God. If indeed they were 20,000 soldiers against over a million soldiers, they couldn't trust in numbers, because the odds were against them. And even though God is not mentioned in these verses, it is clear that when they win the battle, that it was a miraculous win. It was miraculous not only because of the enormous odds, but also because their own army was spread out so thinly, because the losses of Absalom's men may have been almost double David's total combined soldiers. And I will explain in a bit. Verse 7 says,

2Sam. 18:7 The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David, and a great slaughter of twenty thousand took place there that day.

That means that there was a death in Absalom's army for every soldier in David's army. But the losses may have actually been more than that because verse 8 says,

2Sam. 18:8 For the battle there was scattered over the face of the whole countryside, and the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

If the 20,000 is a reference to what the sword devoured, then the implication is that Absalom's army lost over 40,000 men that day. We don't know for sure; the text is a bit ambiguous. But the fact that the woods devoured more men than the sword devoured implies that God was moving nature against Absalom. Commentators have tried to guess whether this was poisonous snakes, animals, the pits and cliffs in that area, or something else. We really don't know, and we don't need to know. All we need to know is that when God is against us, nothing can be for us. It's the reverse of Romans 8:28. God moved even nature to be against Absalom. This was a divine intervention that cannot be explained simply in terms of the wisdom and prowess of David and His leaders. The seventeen Psalms that David wrote on this day shows that he was fighting this battle through prayer from the city. His trust was in the Lord.

- 1. The enormous odds against them**
- 2. Their success in spreading the huge army thinly**
- 3. The enormous losses of the enemy**
- 4. The fact that nature was against Absalom and for David**

B. "...and keep your powder dry" (responsibility/duty)

- 1. By dividing into three, they spread Absalom's forces out (v. 8a)**

But if David would have had gunpowder back then, he would have kept his powder dry. In other words, he would have done his duty. He would have done his best as a leader, and each soldier would have done their best as a soldier. And the women and children who stayed with David in the city did their best to pray to God Almighty.

And we see four strategies of war that symbolize this taking of duty seriously. He divided his armies into three, thus forcing Absalom's forces to spread out over a wider territory.

2. By fighting in the thick forest, they kept Absalom's flag-communication at a minimum (v. 6b)

Second, he picked the battle ground that would be most likely to his own advantage, and that was the incredibly dangerous woods known as the "Woods of Ephraim." These thick woods kept Absalom's men from being able to group in large battle formations, kept them from being able to see the normal flag-communications that armies used to engage in back in that day, and these woods were so dangerous with pits and cliffs, that when they started running, it would have been dangerous for them to be fleeing from David's men. So David was engaging in duty by seeking the best territory to engage the battle.

3. Taking one problem on at a time

Thirdly, they took one problem at a time. In the *Leadership Journal*, Hugh Duncan told about an old man who was walking the beach at dawn, and he noticed a young man in the distance picking up starfish and flinging them back into the ocean. When he caught up to the young man, he asked what he was doing. The answer was that the stranded starfish would die if they were left stranded in the morning sun, so he was throwing them back. The old man said, "But the beach goes on for miles and miles, and there are millions of starfish. How can your effort make any difference?" The young man looked down at the starfish that he was about to throw into the water and said, "It makes a difference to this one." And then he tossed it.

And that's a good perspective to take. You may not be able to solve every problem in America, but you can certainly solve the problems that God has presented to you. Duty does not look to the overwhelming job that the whole church is facing and give up. It takes on one problem at a time and leaves the results to God. And that's what each soldier in David's army had to do. There is no way that each soldier could take on 1000 men by himself, which may have been about how they felt outnumbered – 1000 to 1. But each soldier could fight the soldier who appeared in front of him to the best of his ability. And over time, God prospered their efforts and the rest of the army fled.

4. By picking their battle ground first, they were able to reconnoiter and use the treacherous ground to their own advantage

The fourth area of duty that is sometimes mentioned by commentaries, is that by picking their battle ground first, they were able to reconnoiter and use treacherous ground to their own advantage.

So that's verses 1 through 8. And in these eight verses I have tried to illustrate a tiny peek into the huge subject of duty. It's really hard to adequately capture all that is involved in this subject. But to give you a glimpse of how far reaching and important this subject is, I want to re-read that quote from General Douglas MacArthur once again. And it is my prayer that duty would once again become a normal household term with our youth. General Douglas MacArthur said this:

Conclusion

Duty, Honor, Country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying points: to build courage when courage seems to fail; to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith; to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.

Unhappily, I possess neither that eloquence of diction, that poetry of imagination, nor that brilliance of metaphor to tell you all that they mean.

The unbelievers will say they are but words, but a slogan, but a flamboyant phrase. Every pedant, every demagogue, every cynic, every hypocrite, every troublemaker, and I am sorry to say, some others of an entirely different character, will try to downgrade them even to the extent of mockery and ridicule.

But these are some of the things they do: They build your basic character. They mold you for your future roles as the custodians of the nation's defense. They make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid. They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for actions, not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm but to have compassion on those who fall; to master yourself before you seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; to reach into the future yet never neglect the past; to be serious yet never to take yourself too seriously; to be modest so that you will remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength. They give you a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions, a freshness of the deep springs of life, a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity, of an appetite for adventure over love of ease. They create in your heart the sense of wonder, the unfailing hope of what next, and the joy and inspiration of life. They teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman.

Brothers and sisters – embrace your duty before God and pass on a strong sense of duty to your children. Amen.

Duty

2 Samuel 18:1-8

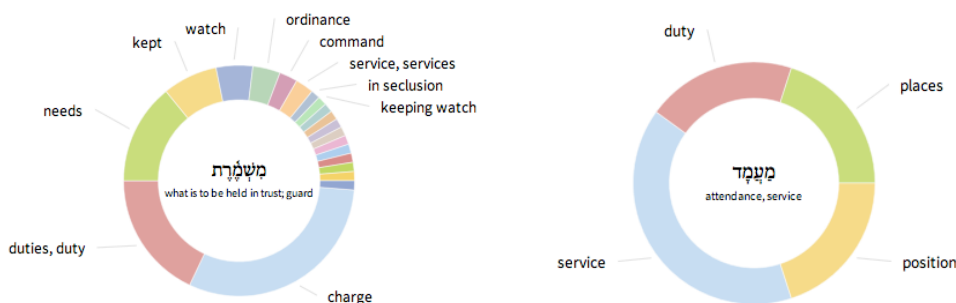
By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-26-2014

Introduction – What does duty mean?

A. If David didn't want to fight against Absalom (see vv. 5,33; 19:1-8), why did he do so?

B. Nuances of מִשְׁמֶרֶת and מִעֲמָד – chart;

Other dictionary entries: An inward impulse to fulfill a stewardship “held in trust,” “duty,” “obligation,” “to be devoted to a task or an office,” “required stance,” “place in life,” “to remain true to your calling,” “faithful to an agreement,” “charge to be kept,” or “a sense of moral obligation” to do something.



C. Illustrations

I. David exemplifies duty under God (vv. 1-5)

A. The God-centered nature of David's sense of duty (Ps. 26,37,63,143)

B. Duty serves despite the odds (v. 1a)

C. Duty calls us to uncomfortable leadership (vv. 1b-2a)

D. Duty is inherently self-sacrificial (v. 2b)

E. One of the twin graces of duty is humility (vv. 3-4)

F. Duty is often in painful conflict with other deep desires and loyalties (v. 5)

G. Duty is sometimes in conflict with the country we love (v. 6a)

II. David's men are inspired to duty under God (vv. 3-8)

A. David's lifetime of heroic duty inspires them to self-sacrificial duty (v. 3)

B. They too are willing to go out against the odds (v. 4)

C. They will later follow David's orders at great discomfort (v. 5-6 with vv. 11-12; 19:2-3)

III. The duty is ours, the results are God's (vv. 6-8)

A. "Trust God..." (faith)

1. The enormous odds against them
2. Their success in spreading the huge army thinly
3. The enormous losses of the enemy
4. The fact that nature was against Absalom and for David

B. "...and keep your powder dry" (responsibility/duty)

1. By dividing into three, they spread Absalom's forces out (v. 8a)
2. By fighting in the thick forest, they kept Absalom's flag-communication at a minimum (v. 6b)
3. Taking one problem on at a time
4. By picking their battle ground first, they were able to reconnoiter and use the treacherous ground to their own advantage

Conclusion