



Sermon – April 22, 2018

Dr. Deron Biles

Verses Covered

2 Samuel 15:13 - 22

If you have your Bible this morning, let me invite you to find 2 Samuel chapter 15 as we are going to talk this morning about what it means to be with Jesus. And while you're turning there, let me say what a great privilege it is for me to be back with you. We at Southwestern Seminary hosted your pastor, he preached in chapel very recently and he did an exceptional job. He did so well we are reevaluating our plans and we are considering even letting him graduate if he'll ever finish. Great privilege to be with you this morning. I'm delighted to be back. It's a great time to be a part of Central Baptist Church. And so it's a privilege for me to be here with you to talk a little bit about what it means to be with the Lord.

March 18th of this year scientists were nervous and conspiracy theorists were on high alert as news of the first fatality involving a self-driving car became common news. It happened at 10 o'clock at night, Tempe, Arizona, when a vehicle driven by a self-driving, an automated machine, operated by Uber, struck a passenger walking across the street and all of a sudden it rejuvenated all of those early thoughts about how much is too much reliance on technology. My wife and I, at home, have an Amazon Echo still in the box. I know what it does, I'm just not sure why I need it to do it. But you understand what the lure of technology is. The lure of technology is the promise to make my life better without costing me something. And while that's OK for technology, the real problem is a lot of people have that same understanding about Christianity. It's the promise to make my life better, but doesn't really cost me anything. But as you read the pages of God's word, you discover that it's never God's intention for us merely to be passive passengers on a passage to paradise, it's God's desire for us to be with Him.

The problem is we have too often fundamentally confused being for Jesus with being with Him. We somehow have the idea if we just like some things that Jesus did, maybe like how we operate Facebook. We check in there periodically from time to time and we like something that He said or we repost it. We think that's somehow following Him when what Jesus really wants us to do is give Him our lives. I want to talk about what it means to be with Him.

We're going to look at a story of a man named Ittai who in his commitment to David gives to us a model of the kind of commitment we need in our lives. In 2 Samuel chapter 15, I want you to look with me beginning in verse 13. The Bible says:

¹³An informer came to David and reported, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." ¹⁴David said to his servants with him in Jerusalem, "Get up, we have to flee or we will not escape from Absalom. Leave quickly, or he will overtake us quickly. Heap disaster on us, strike the city with the edge of the sword. ¹⁵The king's servants said to the king, "Whatever my lord the king decides, we're your servants." ¹⁶The king set out and his entire household followed him and he left behind ten concubines to take care of the palace. ¹⁷So the king set out and all the people followed him and they stopped at the last house while his servants marched past him. ¹⁸Then the Cherethites and the Pelethites and then the people of Gath, six hundred men who came with him from there marched past the king. ¹⁹The king said to Ittai of Gath, "Why are you also going with us? Go back, stay with the new king since you are both a foreigner and in exile from your homeland. ²⁰Besides, you only came yesterday. Should I make you wander around with us today while I go wherever I can. Go back, take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness. ²¹But in response, Ittai vowed to the king, "As my Lord lives and as my lord the king lives, wherever my Lord is, whether it means life or death, your servant will be there. ²²David replied to Ittai, "March on."

Well the context is right in the middle of one of the most sad episodes in David's life. He is in some sense suffering the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba. And when the story begins, David and those who are with him are fleeing the capital city of Jerusalem from his own son Absalom who's leading a revolt against him. I've wondered as I've read the story if somewhere in the middle of this episode, something didn't seem familiar to David. The names have changed and the roles have been reversed, but David's been here before. He's lived through this scene before. Saul, who was the first king of Israel, David was his armor bearer. David served so faithfully with King Saul, Saul made him his chief military officer. He so loved David, he gave his daughter Michal to David as a wife. So David was the king's son-in-law. Shortly after David killed the giant, Goliath, the people of Israel became so infatuated with David, they began to like David more than they liked Saul. They sang a song that said nice things about Saul, but great things about David. And Saul said, "Do you understand what's going on? The people's hearts have turned to David." And in that moment Saul became so jealous of David he tried to kill him twice. Now at that point in David's life, the people were with David. He was so popular, if David had wanted to, he could have led a revolt against Saul like Absalom is doing to him. Or in this moment, with Absalom, David could have led a military coup against Absalom like Saul previously did to him. But David refused to be an Absalom to Saul and he now refuses to be a Saul to Absalom. David's fleeing the city.

When the story begins, David and those who are faithful with him have discovered that the hearts of the people are with Absalom. The Bible says the David, out of fear that Absalom might strike the city and kill the people of Jerusalem, begins to make haste to escape the city. And he walks to the outskirts of the city. He comes to the last house and David stops and he allows all of his soldiers to pass by. One by one you see two waves of special forces, the Cherethites and the Pelethites pass by and then came an army of 600 men from Gath with their leader, a man named

Ittai. Ittai's name in Hebrew means "with me". And perhaps as much as anyone in all of scripture, Ittai was a man who lived up to his name. How many people do you have in your life who when you really need them are always there? You don't have to wonder where they are. You don't have to wish they would be with you there. Always with you. Ittai's name means with me. And you can imagine David took great pride in realizing that this man was with me. Some of the last words that Jesus shared with His disciples, Matthew chapter 28, I am with you always.

This morning I want to challenge you with this question. Are you with Him? Or perhaps maybe in a more general sense the question; who are you with? I heard someone say just recently, "Followers of Jesus may not always know where they're going, but they always know who they're with." We're with Him. And you hear this testimony of Ittai: David I'm with you. And it's a model for us of the kind of faith that the Lord is asking of us. The Bible doesn't tell us how David and Ittai met, but we have a clue in the text. The Bible says that Ittai was from Gath. That means that Ittai was a Philistine. You can imagine, Ittai might have grown up hearing stories about David and Goliath. Only in that case, it would have made sense for Ittai to oppose David. Prejudice would have been natural, even admirable for some. If anyone had a reason not to follow David, it was Ittai. But the irony of the story is this Philistine who had every reason to hate David, followed him. And Israel, who had every reason to love David, forsook him.

Now I want you to see in the story of Ittai a model of how you and I can be with Him. David, in the context of the story, realizes what must have been the awkwardness for Ittai and he turns to Ittai realizing that Ittai is a foreigner. And he says to him, "Go back." In fact, he says it to him twice. "Why don't you just go back. Go back and serve Absalom. Go back to Gath. Whatever you need to do." He's giving him an out. It's a no shame excuse to go home. He even blesses him in the text in verse 20, "May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness." And if that's not enough, David begins to give him some of the reason why it makes sense for Ittai to go back. He gives him four reasons in the text. First of all, he says to him, "You're a foreigner. You're not from here. This is not your fight. Absalom's not fighting against you. You don't need to flee. You're not from here. Not only that, you're in exile. This is not your land. You don't have a house here to protect. You're a foreigner and you're in exile." Not only that, David says, "You just came yesterday." Literally 24 hours ago, you just came to Jerusalem. There's no reason why you should flee the city today. You just got here. You're a foreigner. You're in exile. You just got here yesterday. And then finally, David says, to cap all of that, "I don't know where I'm going. I'm just wandering. I'm just finding a place and so I can't ask you to leave the city to go somewhere where you don't know. You don't know where you're going because I don't know where I'm going." And so David says, "Go back."

But then look at Ittai's response. After David has recounted all of the reasons why Ittai should leave, Ittai says in response,

²¹Ittai vowed to the king, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king is, whether it means life or death, that's where your servant will be."

You know if you're looking for excuses not to follow Jesus, you can always find them. They're not hard to find. Some of them will even sound reasonable if you work through them in your mind. If you're looking for an excuse to turn away from the Lord, you'll easily find an excuse. What I

want to suggest to you today. What we need today are men and women of faith who have a faith like an Ittai. Because what we have to lose today may be greater than what we've ever had to gain in the past. We need people who are with Him. Ittai's faith is the kind of faith that says to David, "Whatever the circumstances, whatever might come, I am with you." Because you see Ittai's of faith are not satisfied to stand on the sidelines when others cross over. They don't talk about being faithful, they're faithful. They do whatever they can to serve the one who they have entrusted with their lives. And when David hears of the commitment of this man, Ittai, you see the simple expression that David says. In my translation, march on. Literally what David said to him is, "Cross over." The image that you see and the language as though David drew a line in the dirt and he said to Ittai, "When you cross this line, there's no crossing back. There's no going back when you cross over this to go with me. There's no going back." Ittai said, "I'm with you, David." And David said, "Cross over."

Now I want you to see the testimony of this man. The aspects of his faith to David. And then ask yourself the question, "Is this the kind of commitment that you have with the Lord?" Ittai says three things to David. I want you to see what he says to him. The first thing Ittai says to David, "David I'm with you whenever you need me. Whenever you need me, I'm with you." David said to Ittai, "You just got here yesterday. 24 hours ago you just came and now you're wanting to leave with me today." And Ittai says, "It doesn't matter that I just got here yesterday." In response, "As the Lord lives and as you king live, I'm with you." When you get to the end of Ittai's commitment there at the last part of verse 20, he says to him, "Whatever it means as my lord lives, as my lord the king lives, that's where your servant will be." And the indication of the text is that's where I'll be and that's where I'll stay. I'll be there today. I'll be there tomorrow. I am with you. I wonder sometimes if we've not made following Jesus like following somebody on Twitter. We occasionally check in from time to time and we might repost something or we might like what he said. And then we go about the rest of our day and if things get too uncomfortable or if all of a sudden He might say something with which we might disagree, we can always unfollow. But that's not what Ittai says to David. He said, "David whenever you need me, I'm there. It doesn't matter that I just came yesterday. I'm willing to follow you today."

Matthew chapter 4 records the first ministry details of Jesus' life. It's right after His baptism and the Spirit of the Lord led Him into the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil for 40 days. And then right after that, Jesus begins to assemble His team. And He's walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and He comes across two sets of brothers. First of all, He came across Peter and Andrew. The Bible says Peter and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea and Jesus said, "Follow me and I'll make you fish for men." And the Bible says immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus. And then the three of them went further down the shore and they came across another set of brothers with their father Zebedee, James and John, they're in the boat, they're mending their nets, and the Bible says Jesus called them. You see their response, immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Jesus. And Matthew records the same response using the same words of both sets of brothers. Immediately they left and followed. And Matthew wanted to emphasize the immediacy of their obedience because you see, the time to follow Jesus is the moment that He calls. Whenever you need me, Ittai says, I'm willing to follow. Is that the nature of your commitment to the Lord? Are you willing to follow Him whenever He needs you? Well look further in the story. Not only does Ittai promise to be with David whenever you need me, the second thing that Ittai said to David is, "David I'm with you wherever you lead me." Look

what Ittai says, “Whever my lord the kind is, I’m with you.” You don’t have to wonder where I am. You look over your shoulder, I’m with you. You can imagine how comforting that was for David in this moment when he’s wondering who it is with him. When he’s wondering if everyone who is with him is in fact with him. In fact, earlier in the text, the Bible records that a close friend of David had already turned away. Now here’s this stranger who’s pronouncing his life, his loyalty, his allegiance, whatever you ask of me, David, I am with you. I am with you whenever you need me. I’m with you wherever you lead me.

Sometimes we sing that song, wherever He leads, I’ll go. And I wonder sometimes when we sing those words if we really mean what we’re saying. Wherever You lead, I’ll go. Let me stop and think about that. Sometimes we have this, this mindset of a negotiation with God. God I’ll be with you, but you know, as long as You don’t lead me to the jungles of Africa. Or as long as You don’t lead me here. As long as You don’t ask this of me, I’m with You. But that’s not what you see from Ittai. Wherever my lord the king is. In fact, you see him use that phrase twice in the text. Wherever my lord the king is. As long as the Lord lives, as long as my lord the king lives, I am with you. Is that true of your relationship with the Lord? The Bible says that when God called Abraham, He called him and said, “I want you to go wherever I send you.” When God called Jeremiah, He said, “To whomever I send you, that’s where you should go.” And it might be this morning God is listening for your wherever. God wherever You need me. Wherever You want me to go. Wherever You might lead, I am willing to follow. Because ultimately the absolute test of our faith is what we will not do for Him. Ittai said to David, “I’m with you wherever you lead me.”

But there’s one more thing I want you to see about Ittai’s commitment. Ittai said to David, “I’m with you whenever you need me. I’m with you whenever you lead me.” And he says to him thirdly, “I’m with you whatever it costs me.” Look at the last part of Ittai’s pronouncement of faith. “As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king is, whether it means life or death, that’s where your servant will be.” Ittai’s kind of like a male counterpart of Ruth in the Old Testament. You remember the story of Ruth? Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, they both lost their husbands, Naomi’s concerned about her daughter-in-law, and she says to Ruth, “Why don’t you go back to your homeland, go back to your people. Maybe you’ll find a husband there.” She’s concerned about her. And you remember what Ruth said to her mother-in-law? She said, “Wherever you go, wherever you live, I’m going to be with you. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God.” My wife sang that song to me at our wedding. Only she sang it in King James: wither thou goest, I will go. That’s the commitment that Ittai’s making to David. Whenever you need me, wherever you lead me, whatever it costs me, I’m with you. Look what he says. He has no delusions of what it means to follow David. Even if it means life or death because Ittai knows that in all probability, following David means death. He’s the guy who’s fleeing the capital. He’s the guy who’s wandering. He’s the guy who doesn’t even know where he’s going, but Ittai says there’s no negotiations. I’m not in this because I think we can win. I’m not in this because of what I get out of it. I’m following you my lord the king. Whatever happens, I’m with you.

If there are any conditions on your obedience to the Lord, you’re not with Him. You might be for Him but you’re not with Him. And Ittai says to David, “David I am with you whatever that means. I’m with you today. I’ll be with you tomorrow.” When we fast forward three chapters in the text

and you get to 2 Samuel 18, we see Ittai again and he's still with David living up to his commitment. Only now with greater authority and David's made him one of his chief military officers because he was faithful to his commitment to David. I am with you. This morning I want to ask you, "Is that the kind of commitment that you have with the Lord?" Ittai said to David, "I'm with you." This morning I want to ask you, are you willing to say to the Lord, "Whenever You need me, wherever You lead me, whatever it costs me, I'm with You." Matthew tells a story in Matthew chapter 8, one day Jesus was walking along with his disciples and a young man came up to him and said, "Master I'll follow you wherever you lead me." Jesus turned to him and he said, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And Matthew records it in such a way that what Jesus was asking of him was too much. He wasn't willing to follow that far. But the question of the text and the question that I want to pose to you this morning is, "Are you willing to be with Him?" Because you and I know it's much easier to talk about being faithful than it is to be faithful. It's easy to give up what doesn't really cost us, when it doesn't really count, and call that faith. But the Lord is asking, He's looking for someone who will give Him our whatever, who will give Him our whenever, and who will give Him our wherever. So this morning, like Ittai, you and I are going to have to decide whose side we're on. With whom are you following today? Because this is what it means to be an Ittai. To have that kind of commitment of faith to say to the Lord, "I am with You." Lord doesn't just want you to like Him. He wants you to follow Him.

So this morning I want to ask you that simple question. Are you with Him? Now I want to challenge you, if that's your commitment, if that's your desire, to pray this simple prayer. Lord I'm with You. Whatever that means, that's my offer, that's what I'm saying to You, Lord. I don't have to know where You're going. I don't have to know what you're doing. I don't have to know where you're leading. Lord I'm with You. And maybe this morning that's what God is waiting for from you. To have the simple act of faith, to say to Him, "Lord I'm with you wherever You lead."

Would you bow together in prayer with me this morning? This morning I want to challenge you to have the faith of an Ittai. To say to the Lord, "Whenever You need me, wherever You lead me, whatever it costs me, Lord I'm with You. I want to be with You." For some of you that may mean a new commitment. To say, "Lord I'm with You. I recognize what You've done for me. I recognize the sacrifice that God, in Christ, paid for me to be with Him. Lord I want to be with You." Some of you that means coming back. You'd have to say in all honesty, "I used to be with Him, but I wandered away. But this morning, Lord, I want to be with You. I want to come back. I want to follow You in faith." For some of you it means a commitment to go wherever. You know God's leading. You know God's already been speaking to you and you've been putting it off. The Lord, this morning, is simply asking you to go wherever.

God I'm praying this morning that whatever You ask of us, whenever You ask it, whatever it means we'd say to You, we're with You. And if You're calling this morning, I pray You find us sensitive to the leading of Your Spirit. I pray You hear You find us listening to what You might say. And God though we may not know everything that's involved in that commitment, I pray You find us faithful. I pray You hear the words of that simple prayer from our mouths, "God we're with You." That it might be something that we pray with passion, we pray with integrity, we pray

not knowing all that it means, but to mean it with all our hearts. So God this morning as we're listening at Your speaking, may we follow in faith. In Jesus name. Amen.