

“CHRONICLES OF ENCOURAGEMENT – 2”
1 Chronicles 29:1-20

We’re turning again this evening to one of the passages which Pat Cartmale shared with the elders in the wake of our Gift Day earlier in the year. You may remember that a month or so ago we had a look at some words from *1 Chronicles 16* and considered how they might be applicable to our situation today. You may also remember that these two books were written with a particular aim in mind, connected very closely to the time in which they were written. These were amongst the last books of the Old Testament to be written and so were intended to be read by the people of Israel who had returned for a long period of exile in a foreign country. (There’s a clue as to the time they were written in this evening’s reading, where in v7 mention is made of “*ten thousand darics*”. A daric was a unit of currency introduced by King Darius long after the time of King David.)

As they came back to the land of their roots, a land that they believed had been promised to them by God as part of his eternal covenant with them, they were a little bewildered by all that had gone on and at the prospect of all that was going to happen. What was going on? Why had God allowed this to happen to them? What about their roots and their heritage? They felt that there was a real danger of becoming disconnected from their history and they wondered, quite frankly, what God thought he was playing at. Was he still interested in them now that they no longer had a king of David’s line? They were disorientated by all the changes that were going on and needed reassurance that God was still there.

So someone, possibly Ezra, wrote these two books - which we now call *Chronicles* - to demonstrate that God was still interested in them. But that interest is not demonstrated in transitory things: It is demonstrated by the unchanging nature of the basis of their faith. The stability is apparent in such things as the Law, the Temple and the words of the prophets. *1 Chronicles* begins at the beginning, with Adam, and charts the development of God’s dealings with his people down through their turbulent history. The lists of names and the genealogies serve to emphasise the continuity that there has been, the ways in which so much is interconnected. God’s activity within the life of this chosen nation has a consistency about it which is reassuring and comforting. It is full of words of encouragement, with plenty of examples to back it up - which is why we’ve entitled this short series *Chronicles of Encouragement*.

Anyway, the people who had returned from exile were wondering quite how they were going to rebuild their nation again. Everything was in such a mess after the years of neglect while they had been in Babylon. The political and religious infrastructure was pretty well non-existent and they needed to work hard to get things going again. You can read something of the problems they faced in the writings of prophets such as Haggai and in the books of *Nehemiah* and *Ezra*. In the passage we’ve read this evening,

they are reminded of what David and his people did when the time came for them to build the Temple many years before. Chapters 28 and 29 tell of the Second Jerusalem Assembly, called by David to announce that his son Solomon would succeed him as King and that the long-awaited project to rebuild the Temple was about to get under way.

In order to get the development fund for this new building started, David told the people what he had put into it, recognising that this was a building “*not for man, but for the LORD God.*” And his gift was pretty impressive, even for a king. It wasn’t just resources from the public purse, but also a great deal of stuff from his own private treasury (v3). The L’Oréal cosmetics adverts encourage you to use their expensive products “*because you’re worth it.*” How much more did David believe that God was worth it! We tend to shy away from such extravagance today, saying that our resources should be put into people and programmes rather than buildings – and there’s a good deal to commend that argument – but money spent on providing buildings and other things for the glory of God can also say something powerful about our devotion to him. Do we really want him to have the best?

Having told the people what he has given, David then challenges them to contribute as well. “*Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?*” he asks in v5. The people then provide yet more gifts for the coffers and again it is the leaders who show the way, drawing praise from the people at their generosity. Maybe we could try something like that with our development fund – although it does have to be said that modern ministers do not necessarily have the same resources as ancient kings!

Now the people who read this story – those who had just returned from exile – might well have responded that it was all very well for David and his contemporaries to do such things. Israel was then at the height of its power. The situation now was quite different. But, as we saw last time, their situation might have changed, but their God was still the same – and he’s still the same today. Again, using David’s words, the writer of *Chronicles* proclaims something of the nature of God. Here are words of encouragement for men and women of every age, which speak of the greatness of the God who is their Creator and Protector. Look at what David has to say in the second part of this passage (vv10ff).

He starts off by praising God that he is **eternal** (v10). The God whom David is addressing and who is watching over the returnees from exile, is the same God who watched over and guided their “*father Israel*”. This God has been there “*from everlasting*” – he has always existed: and he will be there “*to everlasting*”. This is a great God who transcends all that is transitory and changing. The fact of his eternal nature means that he is wholly reliable.

And having established that he is eternal, David goes on to describe his nature. In him is **greatness and power** (v11a). This God is a God who can accomplish things. He is great, greater than any other God or Lord, but with that greatness comes the capacity for action. There is power there which is used to do things. We do not worship an inactive God, a God who sits on the sidelines, a God who is unable to act. There are times when we become frustrated because it appears that God is not at work, but we need to remember the times when we have seen him in action, the times when we have experienced his activity, and trust that he will again respond to the needs of his people.

The ways in which he acts also point towards his **glory, majesty and splendour** (v11b). This is, for me, one of the most amazing things about God – and David, too, felt that way, as you can see if you read some of his Psalms, which praise God for the ways in which this glory is exhibited in creation. Looking around this universe – either through the telescope or through the microscope, or just using your plain ears and eyes – you cannot fail to be moved by the astounding beauty of it all. I know that human beings have done a great deal to mask and destroy that beauty in our relentless drive for profit and artificial pleasure, but this creation reflects the splendour of God in ways that can raise our spirits and fill our hearts with joy. And when you consider just what a majestic creation this is, how much more majestic must the Creator be. These are some words from a song by Geoff Moore on his most recent album. The song is called *The Artist*. “*Do you love the way a summer sunset’s painted on the sky, or how the eagle dances when he flies. And if you find you’re silenced by the beauty that surrounds us – wait until you meet the Artist.*”

David goes on to remind his listeners that **everything is God’s** (vv11c,14b). Those generous givers may well have thought that they were making some grand gesture of sacrifice, that they were giving God something that was all their own, but David has to tell them – and us – that we actually own nothing. Everything we have, all that we use and abuse and misuse every day, is created and provided for us by God. Human beings cannot produce a single thing from nothing. Whatever we create – be we scientist or artist – we use the raw materials that God has supplied. These words of David’s are used in the liturgy of the Church of England at the offertory to remind the congregation that there is no merit in their giving things to God – it’s all his anyway. That is very humbling for us. But it’s also a great encouragement to be reminded that God does supply all our needs. Ultimately he gives us everything.

And that’s not true only in the material realm. He is also **the provider of wealth and honour** (v12). It is God who gives us worth, who ensures that no-one is worthless. And he it is who blesses some with special honour. Maybe not the people we would expect to be held up as examples of greatness and glory – the sports stars and media celebrities. After all, that’s not really what honour is all about. But the Bible speaks of honour for those who are faithful, for those who are wise (especially due to their old age), for

those who are humble and selfless. God is the source of that honour and the source of that blessing. It is all from him and that is the honour and blessing we should be seeking, not the transient recognition of our fellow citizens.

It's because of all that – because he is the Creator and the Provider – that God is to be praised as the **Ruler of all things** (v12b). Everything is under his authority and he is the One who arranges all things. There's a source of encouragement! It's the aspect of God's character that Paul picks up in *Romans 8:28ff*. We can have complete confidence in him because he is working things out in his own way. For the people who heard David's words when he spoke them at the assembly, there would have been great encouragement – but they could see what he had provided. For those who read these words in *Chronicles* centuries later, there would have been a message of hope. Their situation might seem desperate, but God was still in charge. In any case, there was nothing they could do in and of themselves.

Because in vv15,16 David recognises that we are actually nothing without God. “*Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope*”, unless we are prepared to recognise God as our Protector and Redeemer. It is only God who can give us hope, who can give meaning to our lives. And not only **are** we nothing, but we **have** nothing either. That's what v16 says so clearly. This is truly a great God whom David is praising, a great God whom we worship today. It must be an encouragement to us that he is still at work.

Indeed, this God is a God who inspires his people. David talks of him as a God who inspires **integrity** (v17). He can look into our hearts and see if what we are doing and saying actually match up. David had praised God in extravagant terms. And he had demonstrated the integrity of his life by giving to God, by sacrificing from his enormous wealth. Because God also inspires **generosity** (v17). David gave “*willingly and with honest intent*”. This was, as the chorus puts it, a “*sacrifice of praise*”. I wonder how willingly we give. And whether our intent is honest – a desire to worship God, rather than a desire to show off how much we have: the offering of a “*cheerful giver*”, rather than the reluctant handing over of small change because we feel pressured into it.

And when we give and see others giving with integrity and generosity, there is a sense of **joy** (v17) as well. The knowledge that all are working together in trying to bring the best possible worship to God is uplifting. The gifts that were given along with David's gifts came from the leaders of the people (v9). Most of the ordinary people did not have anything to give, certainly not on the same scale. Yet they rejoiced along with David. They didn't complain that they had nothing to give, or moan that the rich people were just showing off. They joined together and recognised that this was all part of their corporate response to God for his greatness and goodness. We need to do the same – to rejoice together: to allow God to inspire that joy in us both through his own being and acts, and through the response of others.

David's prayer, too, mentions that this great God should inspire **loyalty** (v18). Those who had returned from exile and read these words many years later would have been keenly aware that the reason they had been in exile was punishment for their lack of loyalty towards God, their wandering off to worship other gods, their following of priorities other than those which their God had set out for them. We are challenged by these words as to our own loyalties. Do we really seek to tread the way of the Lord in all that we do? Do we keep him at the very centre of our personal agenda? Have we, as the writer of *The Letter to the Hebrews* puts it, "*Fixed our eyes upon Jesus, the beginning and end of our faith*"?

Finally, this God inspires **praise** (v20). As we saw last time, the automatic response when people hear such words as these, when the Spirit of God is at work amongst them, is to worship, to call out in praise. In many ways, my expanding on these words of David this evening has robbed them of their impact and spoiled the effect they could have had if we had simply read them and allowed the Holy Spirit to impress them on our minds and hearts. But the words are still there and they can still cause us to fall down in worship and praise. And they can act as an encouragement to us as we recognise that the God of Israel, the God of David, the God of the newly liberated Jews, is the same God who has touched our lives in Jesus and who continues to work in us through his Holy Spirit. More soberingly, perhaps, they can act as a challenge as we examine ourselves to see whether we respond to this great God with integrity, generosity, joy, loyalty and praise.