

Moving Beyond Commitment

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open to a passage in your Bible that you may or may not have ever been in an environment such as this where it has been taught and/or preached, it's 1 Kings 20, and one of the reasons that this is one of those chapters is not simply because it is in 1 Kings that Chronicles, all these people that we cannot pronounce their names, places we've rarely ever heard of is it features today an individual by the name of Ahab. If you're not familiar with Ahab, he is single-handedly one of the most deficient characters in all of your Bible, in fact, the chapter before this we discover that he goes running after a prophet by the name of Elijah. This is the one who went up on Mount Carmel and we saw hundreds of the Baal worshiping priests who tried to get a hold of their god and could not, that they were slain by Elijah. We discover that Elijah had to run quickly to get back to town before Ahab did because he was going back to tell his wife what had happened. If there is anybody in this world who married poorly, it was Ahab. He married a woman by the name of Jezebel. We don't name our babies Jezebel. We don't take Jezebel to prom and do not marry Jezebel. I mean, she was not just bad, she was real bad. In fact, I know a coach that called them, that's a rough-tide woman. You say, what's a rough-tide woman? Oh, it looks good on the outside but she will sweep you out and drown you, boy. That's what he used to say. Jezebel is one of those.

The very next chapter, chapter 21, he gets jealous over this businessman's, shall we say, vineyard that he possesses. He obviously has done well and he has a beautiful estate, he goes down and he tries to buy the vineyard. He's not willing to sell it. He comes back and he pouts to Jezebel so what does she do? She sends some fake communication, some false information and she essentially has him arraigned and killed and says, "Have your vineyard, honey, it's for you." We have a man who is weak. We have a man who is shallow if any spiritually, so how is it or why is it that here in chapter 20 we would look to this man for guidance? Can I share with you that every now and then a broken clock is right, twice a day, and it is in chapter 20 that even Ahab teaches us a valuable lesson. Now I want you to hear this because we're gonna go full circle at the end. If Ahab can get this lesson, then surely we should as well.

In 1 Kings 20, beginning in verse 1 it says,

1 And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. 2 And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Benhadad, 3 Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the [best things or the] goodliest, are mine. 4 And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.

One of the only wise decisions that Ahab made in his life was when he was surrounded by these 32 kings, when he was surrounded by these leaders who not only had humanity and an army thereof but they had horses and they had chariots, he realized that there was no way he could win the battle so what did he do? He surrendered and we see later in the chapter the Lord delivers Israel out of the situation but the thing I want us to see today is that Ahab actually understood what it looked like to surrender, and today I want to challenge us, I want to encourage us in our personal walk with the Lord to move beyond commitment to surrender. He shows us what it looks like, may our lives imitate it.

Now when we talk about commitment and surrender, let me begin by giving us a little perspective here. Those are words that we use in our culture oftentimes flippantly, but I want to give you the actual dictionary definitions for these two words. When you commit to something or you say, "I've made a commitment," it is the act of pledging or engaging yourself to somebody or something. When you surrender, you actually yield your power to or you deliver yourself up to another for their possession to do with as they so choose.

Now allow me to unpack that for just a moment. Oftentimes we think that commitment is a good thing, do we not? After all, we say they're very committed people, they're dedicated people. The problem with commitment is this: though it sounds good on the outside, all of the decision making is in the one who makes the commitment. You pledge yourself. You engage yourself. Let me give you the undercurrent there: as long as it's going the way you hoped it would, you're in the game, but as soon as things often go sideways, or as soon as things go not as you had hoped or desired, all of a sudden you decommit.

Allow me to illustrate in the world of sports. I know I'm a sportsaholic. I know I have children that play but just put up with me for a few moments. We just got through with what we know as signing day where these high school seniors all across the country find themselves at a table to put their name on a piece of paper for the respective school that they will play a sport. Now we typically think of signing day as football but there's other sports as well that participate therein. Why is that important? Because how many times have we seen and maybe if you haven't seen, trust me it's there, that there will be some prospect who's committed to a certain university, he's gonna play a certain position there and he commits to them, and then all of a sudden they don't win as many games as he thought they would, all of a sudden there's a coaching change or all of a sudden there's another recruit in his position and what do they do? They go onto social media and, you got it, they de-commit. In other words, they pledged themselves, did they not? "I will go

to your school. I will play for that coach." But then what do they do? They pull back and say, "You know, this isn't going the way I hoped it would. I'm going to de-commit."

That mentality did not originate with high school seniors, in fact, I'm about to go from preaching to meddling so just put up with me. I don't know if it's you but it's me, I can't stand this transfer portal we've got in sports. "All of a sudden a new recruit comes in my position and I'm gonna go play somewhere else." A university that has poured their money, poured their time, poured their energy and all of a sudden, "I'm gonna take my ball and go somewhere else," literally is what they do. In other words, "I signed up and it's not going the way I hoped. I think I'm gonna go somewhere else." You know that college sophomores and juniors didn't learn that on their own. It seems several decades ago that in the professional ranks we came up with free agency. Oh, that's right, if they won't pay you what you think you're worth or if the coach isn't doing how you hoped they would, I'll go to somebody who will treat me with respect. I'll go somewhere else. You see, in the world of sports today which is for entertainment purposes we have created a culture that says if it's not going the way you like it, just go somewhere else even though you committed, even though you signed, even though you pledged. You see, when you commit, it sounds good on the outside, the problem is all of the power is within the person signing the document.

Let's get a little more serious. The definition is to pledge or engage. How many times have we seen in our own families and in those that we love, two people in an environment such as this, all their friends on the platform, all their family there, they stand before God, they stand before each other and they pledge to one another that in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, til do us part. We even exchange rings. It's not like the sports world where you sign a piece of paper, we actually put a piece of metal on our finger to remind us that we pledged, to remind us that we engaged.

For the sake of illustration, I would pull my ring off today to show you how easy it is but 24 years later and many more pounds than that, I can't get it off my finger for the illustration, but I guess Tracy's stuck with me. I can't get the ring off. But the same goes for our home, does it not? "This marriage thing isn't going the way I hoped it would. The finances aren't what I hoped. This isn't what I hoped." So what do we do? We de-commit. In other words, when we commit to something, what we're essentially saying is, "I'm in as long as it goes the way I want it to." When we surrender, we actually take ourselves and say, "Okay, I'm no longer making decisions. I'm gonna put everything that I am into your control."

Let me start with the sports world for just a moment, the sport of what we know as boxing, it's called throwing in the towel. When they throw the towel in the ring it means, "I'm done," and that referee can do whatever he wants. Typically they stop it at that point. For those of you that like the cages, it's called tapping out. In other words, every sport has some point that a coach or an authority figure can come in and say, "We're done. We surrender." The most obvious example is in what we know as war time when somebody realizes, much like Ahab did in this situation, he's surrounded by 32 kings, I mean, there's

no way he can match them, so what does he do? He waves the white flag and he says, "I surrender."

You know, if you'll allow me to transfer that to more important matters. Years ago, a pastor that I know went to what we know as the Eastern European block, went on a mission trip and I want you to know I'm all in favor of all kinds of mission trips to all places in all forms and fashions, but they went there to help those believers who had been so persecuted for so long and they had so little, that though they had people, they didn't have facilities, they didn't have buildings, and so basically it was a mission trip like I've been on many times and hopefully you have. It's a construction based mission trip, we're gonna build places of worship, we're gonna build parsonages, we're gonna give the church that which they have not had in many many years.

Over the course of about two weeks, they got to know each other because many people from America had come over to help these people in the community. Over the course of time, the two pastors, one from America, one from Eastern Europe, began to converse and as they did so, the Eastern European pastor said to him, he said, "You know, I think American Christians are the most committed Christians on the planet." Do you know what he did? Put his chest out, got kind of excited. He said, "That's right. When y'all need us, y'all call, we come. We're the most committed." He began to kind of gleam in his eye and the Eastern European pastor realized he didn't take it the way he meant. He said, "Sir," he goes, "I think you've misunderstood me." He said, "What do you mean? We're committed. Here we are. We're giving of our time. We've given our vacation. We're giving our resources." And here's what that Eastern European pastor said, he said, "Yes, you have but somewhere back in time you replaced the word surrender with commitment."

Some years ago, I found myself in a very similar part of the world and a pastor explained it to me this way, "You know, in America y'all want Jesus but over here we need him." That's the difference between commitment and surrender. When you want Jesus when things are going rough, when you want Jesus when the finances aren't there, when you want Jesus you find yourself in a position of commitment. When you need him, you find yourself in a position of surrender. You see, even though this was a military struggle, here's what Ahab is showing us. What does it look like when we surrender to that which is bigger and greater and stronger than us? Is that not who the Lord should be in our life? He said, "I surrender. I'm not gonna call the shots anymore. I'm gonna let you call the shots."

Interesting the particulars that come up here when you get to verse 3. Here is what Benhadad requests of him and, by the way, this is what Ahab does agree to. He says, "Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the best things are yours." Now I want to work through those particulars for just a moment. What do those phrases mean? When he says your silver and your gold, do you know what he's saying. He's saying, "You can have all my resources." Now remember he's surrendering, he's not committing, and I know what some of you are thinking, "Okay, this is where we get to that point where we're gonna talk about giving and tithing and 10%." Oh, no, no, no. You

see, surrender isn't 10%, surrender is 100%. In other words, it's not just that which we should give directly to the Lord, he has called us to be stewards of it all. I've got news for you: everything you have in your bank account is not yours. It's his and he allows us the privilege of giving, managing and being a steward thereof. Not only is there ample biblical evidence that we should trust the Lord with our financial resources, but for those of you who battle this, for those of you who have questioned this, can I just give you a hint? It really forces you to make a family budget because when you're only gonna come home with 9 out of 10, it forces you to think about where that's going.

You know, we can get into all the parameters biblically of that but I want to share a story that took place some years ago. I wasn't always in a scenario like this where a church was growing and thriving and such. Many years ago, I found myself in a situation that was much a struggle and really it was an internal struggle and there was, you know, really questioning who we are, where we're headed, and what's the purpose. It was one of those times where almost every meeting I went into was difficult. Business meetings were dreaded. It was just not a fun time.

One Sunday night, we had had a discussion as the church body, and can I just say it didn't go real well. There was tension in the air. There were statements that were made that were not only negative but personal in nature directed even across the pews. It just was as unpleasant a church gathering I've ever been in my life. The next morning, Monday, walked in and in that location in that church there was a team of people that would come in and they would count the resources, they would count the money. And they were in there doing their thing and I guess my countenance showed, I was kind of disheartened at what had taken place, and I'll never forget this sweet lady, she was retired from the banking industry and she was using her gifts to help the church with their finances, the sweet lady called me over and she said, "Brother Jeff, are you discouraged about last night?" I said, "Ma'am, I haven't slept." I said, "I'm frustrated. I almost didn't come this morning." She said, "You don't need to be discouraged." Now remember, she is filing the checks as we're talking. She's counting the money as we're talking. I said, "Ma'am, you were there last night. It was horrific." She said, "Oh, don't you worry about it." I said, "Ma'am, how do you have this disposition?" And as she's filing the money she says, "Brother Jeff, can I just tell you that those who often gripe the most give the least?" Let that sink in. Do you know what 2 Corinthians 9:7 says? "Be a cheerful giver." You see, when we've surrendered our resources, we no longer care how, where, when and why.

Can I tell you what I'm worn out with? I haven't experienced this in a while so don't be looking around. People say, "I don't like the way church is going. I'm just not gonna tithe anymore." You're not surrendered, you're committed. It's not about the Lord, it's about you because it's how you want it used, your preference, your style. I've gone to meddling, haven't I? But when we surrender, we say, "God, I'm gonna give it to you and I'm gonna let you have it." That's not just 10%, that's all of our financial resources.

Now guys, don't get excited about this next statement, he said, "You can have my wife." That's not the time to laugh, guys. But what's he saying? He's saying, "You can have my family." If there is an area in our lives more than money that we try to control, is it not

our family, that our children are gonna do what we want them to do? And I understand if they're in your home, I understand parenting, I am one. "Our grandchildren this and that." When's the last time we said, "God, my marriage is yours. My children are yours. My grandchildren are yours. I'm no longer gonna get in the fray here." Because you see, here's the thing, he surrendered. When we surrender to the Lord, here's the revolutionary thing: that means we parent God's way, and we stay married God's way, and we marry people God's way. Not what the culture says or the latest bestseller at the bookstore says. You see, oftentimes we just commit and say, "Well, I'll be interested in my marriage because it's going really well right now," but things go sideways, people get sick, people lose jobs and all of a sudden, "I'm out." What does surrender say? For better or for worse. For richer or for poorer. In sickness and in health. Til death do us part. You know, I know a marriage ceremony looks like it's commitment but really that's a statement of surrender. You're saying it doesn't matter what it looks like, it doesn't matter how it goes, I am here. That goes for our marriages, it goes for our children, it goes for our families. Here's what he was saying, "I'm no longer gonna dictate how the family looks. This is up to you."

Last but not least, now this makes people like me to amen, he said, "Man, you can have the kids. They're yours. Take them." What's he saying? "You can have my future." Now their culture was a little bit different than ours, a lot different, but your 401k was not a bank, it was your children. By him giving his children, he was saying that where I am and how I'm taking care of, and the financial means that I have in life, is no longer in my hands because usually it would be my children. You've seen the bumper sticker, "Be nice to your children, they determine which home you go into." I get it. But here's what he's saying that, "My future is yours."

Let me take that just a step up. We can talk about next week, we can talk about next month, we can talk about next year, we can talk about what we call "retirement" and such, but you know that's the ultimate form of surrender is when we trust our eternity with him. You know, years ago I had an individual who was walking through what you and I would essentially call bankruptcy. He was at the lowest point of his life and he was struggling with how to go forward and the Lord came to him, it wasn't verbal, it wasn't spoken, it wasn't written on the windshield of his car, but essentially what he heard the Lord say was this, "You trust me with your money, you don't trust me with your soul." Think about that for just a moment. Have we come to a place where we truly say, "God, I'm not basing my eternity on my goodness, I'm not basing my eternity on what I've given, I'm not basing my eternity on how I've served, I'm not basing my eternity based on I think I've done it better than the person next to me." You see, that's commitment because we're there and we do based on how we've pledged or how we've engaged, but surrender is about that old rugged cross where the dearest and best, where we lay our trophies down.

You see, what an incredible picture. He says, "Alright, my future is yours." Now you think about that for a moment, if everything that you have financially and materially is in the hands of the Lord, if everybody who you hold near and dear as family and friends are in the hands of the Lord, and if when you walk out of this life to the next, it is absolutely in his hands and not yours, then you get what it means to surrender. The struggle is we

specialize in commitment, we specialize in if it's going the way I like or if it's headed the direction or if this is the way I mapped it out.

I want to close today with the concept of posture and it may look a little different than you expect. Notice in verse 4 he says, "O king," this is Ahab, "I am yours and all that I have." When we think about the posture of surrender, I don't want you to think just of hands out open which we could use that, I don't want you to just think of being on your knees in a helpless position, we could picture that, but oftentimes when we're at home and oftentimes when we're in the workplace and oftentimes when we're out in the community, it's not arms open up and on our knees that really are the posture we can generate.

I want to close today with an illustration that's very near and dear to my heart. Many years ago in a church I was pastoring, there was a lady in that church and I'm gonna give her a name. She's recently deceased and anybody who's watching or listening right now who knows who she is will agree with me whole-heartedly. Her name was Miss Virginia. Miss Virginia was in her upper 60s, maybe early 70s, and she struggled. She could not take care of herself. She was not married. She didn't have a family. It was her uncle and others that helped her with her finances and really the entire church and the community rallied around her. I think the best way that I can picture for you kind of how she walked through life is toward the end of her life she was placed in a special facility to help take care of her, and there on her bed, remember she's in her late 60s, early 70s, there was a collection of stuffed animals and the picture of my family on the mantle. That being said, she walked everywhere. She would go to the store and instead of buying a bunch of bananas, she would buy one banana, take it back home, she'd walk back and buy a second banana until she had accomplished the task. Very simple life, so simple she couldn't read or write. She was what we would call illiterate. On Monday morning, she would walk by the church on her way to the store and typically she would ask for a few moments of my time and she would bring her Bible with her. Now remember she can't read or write, and she would ask me to open the Bible to the passage that I had been preaching from the day before. I would do so, and she would put her hand in it and she'd say, "I just want to touch it." And she'd walk out.

Do you see the heart we're dealing with here? Well, every now and then we'd have a message of this nature where you and I have to make a decision, are we gonna put things in God's hands or in our hands, and Miss Virginia, who couldn't take care of herself, she couldn't read, she couldn't write, when we'd come for the invitation time, she would step out and she would go to the steps and she would start praying. That night my wife and I would say, "If Miss Virginia can get it, then we should all have gotten it."

That's the posture. If Ahab gets surrender, why can't we? I mean, this guy was messed up every which way but possible and he got what it meant to say, "Okay, it's all yours." All of us are incredibly more capable than Ahab and yet I ask why do we keep committing, why don't we surrender? If Ahab could get it, why can't we?