

David's Last Song

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Things were rocky for David in the aftermath of his great sin with Bathsheba, even though he repented, and God had forgiven him completely. The child born of that illicit act died. The damage done to the king's image may have contributed to the ability of his son, Absalom, to steal many hearts in Israel. Absalom nearly stole his father's throne. David fled Jerusalem, and Absalom set up a royal administration in the city, but David prevailed in the war that followed. When a celebration to re-install David on the throne was planned, his home-tribe of Judah ignored the other tribes and, then, got hateful with them when they complained about it.

This civil discontent was exploited by a man named Sheba. To anyone who would listen, he said, "Follow me! The king doesn't care about any tribe but his own!" David sent his armies after Sheba to squelch the rebellion, but the conflict never really took off. A wise woman in the city where Sheba was holed-up negotiated with David's general. It was agreed that if the people of the city would toss Sheba's head over the wall, the army would go back to Jerusalem. That seemed like a swell idea to everyone, so as quickly as it began, Sheba's rebellion was over.

The rest of David's reign was spent in relative peace. God's grace and the passing of time healed the wounds of his soul. Of our text this morning, the chronicler writes: "These are the last words of David." This probably does not mean that they were the last words he ever uttered. More likely, it means that they were the last words he penned, his last song, a reflection upon his life.

When one gets older, he reflects upon the questions that have always intrigued him - things like:

- What do you do when you see an endangered animal eating an endangered plant?
- Why do they lock gas station bathrooms? Are they afraid someone will clean them?
- If the police arrest a mime, do they tell him he has the right to remain silent?
- If one synchronized swimmer drowns, are the rest obligated to drown too?

David reflects on why his life has taken the turns it has, but God has given him answers. In this brief psalm, the old king looks backwards and forwards. He celebrates the honor to which God exalted him when He called him to be a king. He acknowledges how a king should be a blessing for his people and as he does so, I suspect that he had a few poignant regrets over his personal failings. David was Israel's greatest king, but certain failings had stained his legacy. Still, he does not despair, for he remembers a promise from God. His last song anticipates a day when another king, one of his own descendants, would get this whole concept of ideal kingship right.

I. God's Favor upon a Shepherd verse 1

¹These are the last words of David:

"The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High,
the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs:

A. From Tending Flocks to Tending a Nation

David identifies himself according to his humble beginnings. He was the "son of Jesse," the youngest son, in fact. When God rejected Saul as king, He told the prophet Samuel to anoint Israel's next king at the home of Jesse. As his older brothers were to be paraded before Samuel, no one, David included, considered that God might have him in mind, so he stayed with the sheep. After the Lord passed on each of David's brothers, this youngest "son of Jesse" was summoned. This youngest son, this shepherd, was anointed as Israel's next king. David identifies himself as "the man anointed by the God of Jacob." He had no claim to kingliness before God chose him.

David was king, but he also served his nation as a prophet. His words here are called "the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High." An oracle was a prophetic utterance. David was not a prophet by vocation, but on occasion, he spoke God's own words. His psalms were received by the Israelites as inspired by God and were placed on a par with the writings of the prophets.

David was a king and a prophet, but also a priest. He was not of the right tribe to serve in the tabernacle or to wear priestly garments, but he still performed an overtly priestly function as "Israel's singer of songs." The songs David wrote represented the hearts of His people before God. They weren't just David's songs. They were Israel's songs that were used in times of worship, repentance, sorrow and joy. David had a uniquely priestly gift of speaking for his people, giving utterance, if you will, to the passions and the burdens that were on their hearts.

If the average man wrote a song for the great love of his life, it wouldn't rhyme. The cadence would be peculiar. The tune would be unbearable. So, the couple instead latches onto a song that is beautifully crafted by someone who knows what he's doing, and they don't think twice about calling it "their song." It reflects their thoughts and feelings AND it's well-done. I'll be married thirty years next October. When we got married it was fashionable to write one's own vows. I don't hear of that so much anymore. Perhaps, because that era produced so many really awful vows, couples began to look at the traditional vows again and conclude, "Those are prettier."

David had a gift. He sang about affection for God, fear of enemies, love of creation's beauty, which were his own sentiments, but they also captured the sentiments of his people. In this regard, he was a priest. He was the spokesman, the representative of his nation before God.

B. God's Favor Would Come to All Mankind through another Son of Jesse

Perhaps, David was simply being humble when he identified himself as "David, son of Jesse" rather than as "David, king of Israel." But, it only reinforced that as Israel looked forward to a perfect king, they would look for a descendant of David, someone also be called a "son of Jesse."

¹A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him –

the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD – ³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. – Isaiah 11:1-3

Obviously, the king that David anticipated and the shoot from Jesse of which Isaiah spoke are one and the same. He is Jesus, our perfect King, our perfect Priest and our perfect Prophet.

Jesus is God's perfect Prophet. He does not simply speak the words of God. Rather, He is the Word of God in human flesh. To those who observed Him in the flesh, He did not speak about what God thinks or what God likes. He revealed God to them, because He was God in the flesh.

Jesus is our perfect Priest. He did not simply capture the thoughts of our hearts in a song. He interceded before God in our behalves. If a priest is one who stands before God, representing men in whatever need they have, then, there can never be another Priest like Jesus. Jesus presented Himself as the sacrifice that satisfied God's demands for justice in regard to our sins. The Bible also presents Him as the One Who continues even now to intercede for believers in the presence of the Father.

Jesus is a perfect Priest and a perfect Prophet, but He is also our perfect King forever. The benefits of the rule of a perfect King over God's people are the subject of the next few verses.

II. God's Fundamentals for a Kingdom verses 2-4

²The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me;
his word was on my tongue.

³The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me:

~When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God,

⁴he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning,
like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.'

A. David Claims Divine Inspiration for His Vision of God's Kingdom

"The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me." That's pretty specific. As I point out often, that all upper-case spelling of the word LORD represents God's covenant Name of *JEHOVAH*. He is the God of Israel, Who revealed Himself to Moses in the Law and Who now reveals Himself to David in regard to the impact an ideal king should have upon God's nation. David refers to God as "the Rock of Israel." This Name carries overtones of God being the salvation of His people, but it also emphasizes that whatever "the Rock of Israel" has to say is firm and never-changing.

An ideal king must rule over men "in righteousness" and "in the fear of God." This means that the commandments and expectations of God are always steering the king's administration of his office. Before Israel even had a king, God spoke in the Law as to how his kings must govern:

¹⁸When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. ¹⁹It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees ²⁰and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. – Deuteronomy 17:18-20

A number of times in the book of Judges, a time before kings reigned in Israel, a comment is made to this effect: "In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit." These were often disastrous days for the nation, because everyone doing as he sees fit is a always recipe for chaos. But, Israel endured chaos even when it was ruled by kings. The problem in the days of the judges was not that they did not have a king, any king. Rather, they did not have a king who was guided by the Law of God. They did not have a king who would hold the nation accountable for living by the Law.

David says of the ideal king, “he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning.” The idea of being the light of morning is simple enough. His rule, his presence reflects the light of God. David wrote that the word was a lamp for his feet and a light for his path. It would have the same illuminating impact upon the nation as a whole. God’s Law reveals the ways of righteousness, which is why a king over God’s people needs to keep it close at hand.

This king is “like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.” This means that life flourishes where God’s Law is honored. When I lay in bed and listen to the rain fall in the darkness only to arise to a warm, bright sunny morning, the first thing I think to myself is, “I’m going to be mowing this weekend.” Things grow like crazy when sunshine follows rain. That is the effect a king should have on His nation. A king’s role was to ensure that the nation honored God, thereby securing the promises of His covenant blessings.

B. David Never Quite Lived up to the Divine Ideal, but another Son of Jesse Would

Most of the kings over God’s people were generally rotten guys, but every once in a while, one of them would confront God’s Law, repent deeply, lead his people to repentance, and the nation would flourish. David was Israel’s greatest king. He led his nation through many seasons of covenant blessing. But, as successful as much of his reign was, a tendency to collect wives and a propensity for capricious violence slowed him down like a ball and chain. Ultimately, these two vices came together and gave birth to that horrible episode in his life that essentially paralyzed his reign for some time. He took another man’s wife and orchestrated that man’s death.

David was a great king, but he knew as well as anyone that he had not always been the king God desired him to be. God ultimately had a different plan for David’s reign. It was not that he would ever be a perfect king. What sinner could pull that off? It was rather that he would establish a new paradigm for what a king should be – one who was both a ruler and a shepherd of his people – one who had the roles of prophet, priest and king. David did not fulfill any of his roles perfectly, but his rule did reflect God’s vision for Someone who would lead God’s people perfectly.

An important part of God’s redemptive scheme was to establish David’s line and through that line, produce a perfect King and a Savior for the world. Where this King reigns, God is known and God’s Law is inscribed upon human hearts. Where the light of this King shines on His people, the people flourish, bringing forth spiritual fruit of the Kingdom of God.

III. God’s Faithfulness to a Promise verses 5-7

A. David Knew that God’s Ideal King Was Coming verse 5

⁵“Is not my house right with God?

Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part?

Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?

Do you remember when David had it in his heart to build a temple for God, and God told him that it was a nice sentiment, but He also said, “David, you’re NOT the guy.” Had he forged on anyway, seizing the role of national temple-builder, his sin with Bathsheba and that mess with Absalom would surely have brought disrepute to the name of *JEHOVAH*. Funny, God always seems to know what’s best, even when we think we’re making the best plans ever. But, remember, through the prophet Nathan, God said something else to David: “You won’t build me a house. I’ll build you a house.”

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹²When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." -2 Samuel 7:11b-13

In the short run, God was speaking of Solomon and of a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. In the long run, He was speaking of the kingdom of Jesus and of a spiritual temple of believers that would be assembled like living stones into a holy house for God. Who can say if David expected a dual fulfillment to this promise? He just knew that God was the Promise-giver. He says, "Is not my house right with God?" His house was right with God, not because he deserved it, but because of God's covenant of grace. David knew that when God makes a covenant, that covenant does not fail. David trusted that as flawed as his life and reign had been, they were still to be instrumental in the unfolding of God's great salvation for His people, because God said so.

B. David Knew that God Will Defeat Any Who Oppose Him verses 6, 7

⁶But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns,
which are not gathered with the hand.

⁷Whoever touches thorns
uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie."

From experience, David knew that God could deal with his enemies. God had taken out Goliath when David was only a shepherd. God had delivered him from Saul. God had driven the remaining Canaanites from Israel in the early days of his reign. God had taken care of Absalom and Sheba. God used David to do these things. That's obvious. As thorns are removed with tools rather than handled, so God often uses tools to deal with His enemies. Still, just as obvious to David was the fact that all of these victories had been accomplished by God's power and might.

David had known sin and sorrow in his life and under his roof. Who hasn't? But in spite of such failings, the great lesson of David's last song is that we can find a joy that defeats such sorrow when we place our faith in God's promise to help His people. David had failed God often, and tears were warranted just as they are warranted when you and I fail God. Still, greater by far than our failings is the grace of God that has called us into a covenant of salvation. Tears are wiped from our eyes when we realize that God has ushered us into the kingdom of an ideal King, the Kingdom of Jesus. The hope that David expresses in this, his last song, reminds me of the hope that every child of God's is free to embrace. One day, we will stand before God's perfect King:

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;
he will lead them to springs of living water.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." - Revelation 7:17

If you do not live with that hope, hear this: God's covenant is simply that he offers you salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter where you come from or what kind of life you have led. God's grace is greater. Your forgiveness was secured when Jesus died in your place.

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