

## Last Words, But Not Lost Hope

### 2 Samuel 23:1-7

*“In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.” – Jer. 33:15*

**Introduction:** Last words, or the idea of what we leave behind at the last phase of our life, has always intrigued. At this year's graduation charge, we talked about the last words of the famous and not-so famous, and how they could prepare, at 18, to live a life without regret and have last words that mattered and made an impact. We long to have lives that leave a legacy and pattern that others can follow, and ultimately point to Christ. This week I read the story of **James Montgomery Boice**, the beloved pastor who preached for 32 years in the pulpit at Tenth Presbyterian church in Philadelphia, from 1968-2000, where God brought him home at the young age of 61 from cancer. After explaining to the church the reality of his medical condition, he asked the church to pray for the **glory of God in his death**, pointing to the same sovereignty of God that he preached about for those many years. He urged them: **“God is not only the One in charge; God is also good.”** After preaching that morning and stepping out of the pulpit, he pulled one of his associate pastors aside (named Richard Phillips), and grabbing his arm and looking him in the eye, said, **“Press on, brother. Fight the good fight.”**<sup>1</sup>

This story relates to this text in a couple of ways. **First**, these are recorded as the “last words” of David, although there are more written in 1 Kings 2, where David has a private conversation with his son Solomon and calls him to act like a man, obey the Lord, and kill multiple of his enemies. What we have recorded in chapter 23 is the last *public* correspondence with David and the people, an **oracle** which was a special speech-act category reserved for prophetic utterances of unusual significance<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the statement in 2 Samuel 23 is timeless, invaluable, and spoken on behalf of God to His people, both present and future.

**Second**, this oracle answers an all-important and oftentimes nagging question. I've observed at funerals and memorial services that we remember the BEST of someone, not wanting to point out the foibles and inconsistencies of their life – which is a GOOD practice! Memorial services are NOT places to air grievances or bash on the deceased. However, we can all relate to the fact that if someone were to take stock in our entire life – *the good, the bad, and oh so ugly* – we probably would be happy we could not respond out of the casket! Scripture puts forth an **ideal** as the people of God and His disciples. We know we are saved out of darkness TO the light of truth, and our lives should be characterized by putting away sin and putting on *purity, faithfulness, compassion, kindness, love, pure motives, godly habits, contentment, generosity, and growing disciplines*. But if all of this were happening among us, I'd probably be out of a job. The reality is this: **our lives are marked by the same frailty that we see in David's life**. We don't always battle with sin and can give into our lusts. We don't always love God with our whole heart, but love ourselves and mock or look down on others. We complain instead of praise. We forget about God and do things on our own. We get angry when things don't go right. We trust in our own money or ability to make it, cease to be generous but under the guise that we are. We worry, lose heart, and begin to think and act like the world.

It is in this bleak reality is where we find hope in the last words of David. David was far from perfect but could die in peace knowing God's sovereign hand would fulfill everything He promised. It is the same

<sup>1</sup> Richard Phillips, “2 Samuel: Reformed Expository Commentary”, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Robert D Bergen, “1, 2 Samuel, vol. 7, NAC, p. 463.

hope that Hannah held in terrible circumstances (barrenness, mocking, being alone) that God would still guard and prevail (1 Sam. 2:9-10). **Andrew Reid** said it this way:

*“There is a God who is active and who intervenes on behalf of his chosen king and his people. This intervention is the guarantee that his promises will not be overtaken by human frailty. God’s grace is the assurance that the ideal will survive and that life as He intends it will triumph over life as it is. He is a sovereign God who is almighty to save.”<sup>3</sup>*

So let’s look at these last words, and see **surety, beauty, and exclusivity** of the kingdom of God, brought about by His sovereign hand and perfect Son Jesus Christ, who was and is the fulfillment of all God promised, and who was the BETTER KING, the son of David of whom the world longed for.

### The Certainty of the Kingdom (1-3a, 5)

Now these are **the last words** of David:

The **oracle** of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was **raised** on high, the **anointed** of the God of Jacob, the **sweet psalmist** of Israel:

<sup>2</sup> “The Spirit of the LORD **speaks by me**; his word is on my tongue.

<sup>3</sup> The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me:

<sup>5</sup> For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an **everlasting covenant, ordered** in all things and **secure**. For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?

Where do we find certainty in life? It cannot be in people or systems, political parties or countries, finances or careers. No, certainty has to come from something OUTSIDE of ourselves, banking on something that cannot fail. That is what **David** focused on first in his final oracle.

#### 1. The people God chooses

David begins with his **humble beginnings**, as the son of Jesse. This was first to show that he qualified as a king of Israel, being from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:10), but it also reminded everyone of how he started. He was a no one from nowhere, a youngest son of a non-descript man named Jesse in a nothing town called Bethlehem. Yes, David was brave to keep the sheep, fending off lions and bears, but he did not even have the respect of his brothers, nor did Jesse think of him as Samuel came calling. No, David was someone whom **God raised up** simply because God chose to make him king. This was not earned nor gained, but graciously given. This reminds us of who we are in Christ:

*For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were **wise** according to worldly standards, not many were **powerful**, not many were of **noble birth**. 27 But God chose what is **foolish** in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is **weak** in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is **low** and **despised** in the world, even things that are **not**, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God*

God chooses the lowly of this world, the dregs, to delight in and through whom to show His glory. If you feel like you have nothing to offer or have nothing to bring to the table, you are in the right place. What David DID bring to the table was being a **sweet psalmist**, which was simply his expressions of worship, truth, and experience in the Lord. Each believer, including men, should have a heart of worship that includes singing, playing music, and creating truth driven expressions to the Lord – even if you do not have a musical bone in your body.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Reid, “1 & 2 Samuel: Hope for the Helpless”, p. 261

## 2. The way God communicates

David functioned like a **prophet** in his time as king, speaking on behalf of God to the people (a priest spoke on behalf of the people to God). Much of David's songs and poems are included in the canon of Scripture, along with selections of his life story. But how did David know his words were **true and eternal**? David knew exactly where the Words he spoke came from, and it's the same source that we have today: **God the Holy Spirit**, who communicates through mankind as mouthpieces for truth. This is why we can say the Bible is **inerrant** (free from error), **imperishable, and infallible** (incapable of error or unable to fail). The Word of God is effective and sufficient, able to change us from the inside out, transform our thinking (Rom. 12:1-2), and bring us to conviction of sin. This is why we commit our lives to knowing it, understanding it, and applying it. It is what David and Paul knew alike.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

**2 Peter 1:21** *"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

## 3. The security God claims

We run into the same head scratch as we did in chapter 22, when David claims that his house stands secure in the Lord. In chapter 22, he claimed that he had been blameless and righteous, even though we have been given a window into the sin in his life. Now, he poses the question as to how his house will stay secure. *Was it based on his legacy and leadership? Was it based on his righteousness and guidance?* No, David was wise in his old age, and humble to understand the gift of his salvation. The security of his legacy and fulfillment of a future kingdom had everything to do with the **everlasting covenant** that God made with him in 2 Samuel 7. In THIS, David found both **order and security**. You'll remember back in chapter 7 that God promised that David's house, his kingdom, would endure, that his people would be planted in Jerusalem, and there would be rest from enemies. This was *partially* fulfilled in the time of David, rarely enjoyed in the time of his descendants, but will *ultimately* be experienced in the future by those who are part of God's kingdom.

Now we do not often think of security in terms of a coming kingdom, but we should. We also do not often think about order and security based on God's covenant, but we should! Each time we remember and celebrate communion, we remember a fixed covenant, a NEW covenant based on the blood shed by Jesus Christ, a reminder that we are both **forgiven and restored** through His substitutionary sacrifice. In Christ's death and resurrection, the purposes of God's covenant are fulfilled, as explained in **Hebrews 8:10-12** and a ground of assurance and an anchor of hope in **Hebrews 6:19-20**:

*We have this as a sure and **steadfast anchor of the soul**, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf*

Our hope is not in a political entity or our ability to bring on the kingdom by reforming culture. Our security is in the fact that Christ came and fulfilled righteousness on the cross, and will one day come and rule on the earth. *But how will He rule?*

## The Beauty of the Kingdom (3b-4)

*When one rules **justly** over men,  
ruling in the **fear of God**,*

<sup>4</sup>        *he **dawns** on them like the morning light,  
like the sun **shining** forth on a cloudless morning,  
like rain that makes grass to **sprout from the earth**.*

Leadership was created by God to help people to flourish, grow, and thrive. There is true beauty in servant leadership, where love is truly for the other and focus is not on self but on someone else. This kind of “rule” would benefit families, churches, and cultures succeed. But this kind of leadership is hard to find, impossible outside of Christ. It is said that “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”, and the defect of governments or monarchies have been corruption, harshness, and self-promotion. That is why **Israel** was supposed to be different, as a true **theocracy**, God was going to lead them differently and it would be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6). When they asked for a king, God tried to dissuade them (1 Sam. 8), because it would make them **like EVERY other nation**, with the king taking advantage of his position and putting them under his thumb. Even David could not live up to his calling, but at least he knew the goal. He phrased it in terms of **both the character and effect of a godly leader**:

- 1) **Character** – Simply put, a godly leader is one who rules, acts, and presides *justly* based on a proper **fear of the Lord**. Justly means both “innocent” and “right”, meaning it should not be persuaded or corrupted by selfish or outside influence, and will seek to do what is right in the sight of the LORD. Nehemiah showed this type of leadership, as those who preceded him laid heavy burdens and lorded their power over people, but he refused, *“I did not do so, because of the fear of the LORD.”* (Neh. 5:15). This was the kind of leadership that Israel’s kings were **supposed to exemplify**, but fell woefully short of the mark.
- 2) **Effect** – Notice the imagery here is of the key components of vegetation to thrive and grow, plants that become full and lush. The first is the morning light that shines forth, ending the night. This is the type of leadership that provides light, hope, and inspiration in the midst of chaos and misery. *What do we need in the middle of an uncertain world where everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes?* People who know the truth, live it boldly and unapologetically, who are not living for the praise of men, who are settled in their lives, and confident in a direction of life. I talked with a friend this week who was asking for advice with a struggling of motivation for morning devotions. I challenged him not to simply read the devotional thoughts of others but to **study** for himself, to think through a passage, ask questions, wrestle with it, meditate on it, apply it, and teach it. This is how **light breaks through**, where we have parents, co-workers, bosses, friends, pastors, and spouses who know the truth and let it shine brightly in all of life, which will allow everyone around them to thrive. **Second**, the fear of the Lord **promotes life and growth**. This is where leaders can give an **example to follow**, a way of life that can be emulated, and a hope that can be examined. Israel needed that kind of leader. Our families need them too, as does this church.

Now, we know that David ultimately *failed* to fulfill this fully, as did his descendants after. We are not going to preach through Kings right now, but suffice to say, there were NOT too many examples of this kind of leadership after David. That is why there was a **longing for a true King, a just King who delighted in the fear of the Lord** (Isa. 11:3). That is why this is more of a prophetic prophecy than a descriptive legacy. The same word for “sprout” here in verse 4 is the same word “branch” that is used to describe the coming Messiah.

**Isaiah 4:2** *“In that day the **branch of the Lord** shall be **beautiful and glorious**, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel”*

**Jeremiah 23:5-6** *'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness" (cf. Jer. 33:15; Zech. 6:12)*

Simply put, this is a beautiful description of our wonderful Savior, who fulfilled all righteousness and will rule with justice. He is One who we bank on that will set everything right and who has the authority and capacity to accomplish everything He promised. He will cause us to flourish now but we continue to do so into eternity. This is a portrait of a Savior, One whom the OT prophets pointed to and whom we look both back and forward to. **How do we make sense of the tension between the ideal and real?** The answer is in a righteous king who does what is right because He delights in the fear of the Lord and causes us to be **born again to a living hope**. But with the hope of eternal delight comes the reality of eternal plight, and that is the cautionary tale that David ends with.

### **The Exclusivity of the Kingdom (6-7)**

*But **worthless men** are all like thorns that are thrown away, for they cannot be taken with the hand;  
<sup>7</sup> but the man who touches them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear,  
 and they are **utterly consumed with fire.**"*

The final picture is sobering. The gospel is proclaimed to all, but not all will respond. David knew in his lifetime that there were enemies of God who opposed Israel because of their God, and foresaw a time that God would deal with His enemies. We know that there are those who are "*worthless*", or "*wicked, confused, useless*" in terms of their view of God and their own sinfulness. The picture is once again of a field of harvest where the farmer takes an instrument of iron and takes out the thorns from the good crop and burns them in fire. *A scene that is full of beauty ends with a stark reality.* **What do we glean from this?**

1. **The kingdom of God IS by definition EXCLUSIVE, NOT inclusive** – Just as the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30, the Bible is clear that the gospel of the kingdom **DIVIDES** in terms of faith and forgiveness. Those who seek forgiveness will find it; those who refuse will not only NOT receive it, but will be judged because of it. Jesus was clear that there will be those who THINK they are saved, but their lives did not match their words (Matt. 7:21), and who never actually knew Him. This is why we want to be as clear as we can with people. Just because you attend this church, or give here, or are a part of a shepherding group, or have read the Bible, or believe that there is a God and Jesus, that DOES NOT SAVE YOU. We do not do anyone any favors by making them think they belong here if they do not actually believe that Jesus is their Savior and Lord. We must all stand before the Lord one day and give an account, and only those who have believed in Jesus, repented of their sin, and turned to Christ in His righteousness will be saved.
2. **Because of this reality, we should live with a sense of urgency in making disciples** – Sometimes we can hide behind the sovereignty of God when it comes to an urgency in making disciples. It is a beautiful truth that only God can open eyes, soften hearts and give the grace to believe, but He has called us to **instruments that He uses to do so**. "Knowing the **fear of the Lord**, we *persuade others*" (2 Cor. 5:11), and as ambassadors of Christ we **implore/beg/urge** others to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). We give into excuses like fear, lack of opportunity, or lack of knowledge, but the reality is, we either are **disobedient or love ourselves too much to engage**

**in disciple-making, which includes sharing the hard but joyous reality of the gospel.** But it is the very truth that we hide behind which should be the motivating truth that compels us.

What a hopeful opportunity we have in life! We have every opportunity to rest in the leadership that Christ gives us, to be settled, hopeful, and content in this life, knowing that our future is secure and sure. But that reality should lead us to action! We should be confident to deal with our sin and aggressive in sharing the gospel with those who are under God's wrath. The God who saved us saves others, and we want to make that known to all nations. That is what James Montgomery Boice believed, as his final words, after singing a hymn, implored:

***"Don't ever forget that it all leads to Jesus"***