



Singing is an essential part of the Christian life, for it not only expresses our praise to God, but it also sustains us in our sufferings. Scripture-based singing reminds us that “life is hard, but God is good.” For this reason, Paul writes in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

For the last year we’ve been studying *the life of David*, who himself was a song writer – “the sweet psalmist of Israel” – and testified in his most famous psalm, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Ps. 23:4). It may well have been David who prayed in Psalm 71, “Don’t discard me in my old age. Don’t abandon me when my strength is failing” (CSB, NLT).

By the time we get to 1 Kings 1 (p. 260, pew Bible), we see that David has grown old and frail. Yet as he nears the end of his earthly pilgrimage, David continues to experience the faithful presence and providence of God. This doesn’t appear to be the case at the start of the chapter, but it’s undeniably evident by the end of the chapter. There with the aged king of Israel is “the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God [to whom belongs] honor and glory forever and ever” (1 Tim. 1:17). First Kings 1 1 begins this way:

Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. <sup>2</sup> Therefore his servants said to him, “Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm.” <sup>3</sup> So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. <sup>4</sup> The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not.

- 1 Kings 1:1-4

Years ago in a church I pastored, we had an energetic, outspoken elderly woman who would say, “I’m old and I’m bold!” Well, at this point in his life, David was old and cold. No matter how much they covered him, he couldn’t get warm. So, they conducted a nationwide search and found a “beautiful young woman” to lie with David and look after him. This indicates that Abishag was probably intended to be more than an “attractive hot water bottle.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the king had no sexual relations with her. The once passionate lover now had no interest in sex. The mighty warrior who slew giants, conquered kingdoms, and killed lions with his bare hands was now old and feeble, impotent and frail.

Sadly, when David was advanced in years, one of his sons sought to advance himself.

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<sup>1</sup> John Woodhouse, *1 Kings: Power, Politics, and the Hope of the Word*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018) 30.

## Self-Advancement (vv. 1-10)

Continuing the account in verses 5-10, we read,

<sup>5</sup> Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.

<sup>6</sup> His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, “Why have you done thus and so?” He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom.<sup>2</sup> <sup>7</sup> He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. <sup>8</sup> But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah.

<sup>9</sup> Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent's Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, <sup>10</sup> but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother.

- 1 Kings 1:5-11

One commentator notes, “Adonijah should have been with his dying father; instead he was up to no good.”<sup>3</sup> Adonijah is following in the footsteps of his late brother Absalom, who also Adonijah promoted himself and “prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.”

Right after telling us about Adonijah's actions, the narrator goes on to say in verse 6 that King David “had never at any time displeased” his son, not even by asking, “Why are you doing that?” David spoiled him rotten and never reprimanded him. David was a permissive parent, and Adonijah turned out to be a spoiled, pompous, self-centered man. He was good looking on the outside but ugly on the inside. Dads and moms, let this be a warning to you. Permissive parenting doesn't make your children love *you* more. It makes them love *themselves* more. The Lord wouldn't discard David in his old age, but Adonijah had no problem doing so.

Adonijah surrounded himself with “yes men” – supporters who wouldn't contradict him. That's why he didn't invite Nathan the prophet and others to the coronation ceremony, which was held at the “Serpent's Stone.” Even though Adonijah's name means “Yahweh is my Lord,” he doesn't live that way. He's more like “that old serpent, who is the devil, Satan” (Rev. 20:2) who was cast out of heaven for exalting himself against God.

“Here Adonijah puts himself first, doesn't respect the leaders God has put in place, and doesn't seek godly counsel.”<sup>4</sup> Sadly, there are people like that in the church. In 3 John,

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<sup>2</sup> Adonijah was most likely next in line in terms of birth order. The oldest son Amnon was dead, having been killed by Absalom after Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. We don't know what happened to David's second-oldest son, Chileab (2 Sam. 3:2). He probably died young. Absalom, the third son, died a gruesome death after conspiring against the king.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Kings*, eds. David Platt, Daniel L.

the apostle says, “I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have first place among them, does not receive our authority” (3 John 9 CSB). Tony Merida reminds us, “leadership isn’t about giftedness as much as it’s about Christlikeness.”<sup>5</sup> Then he adds, “Let’s be careful in appointing people to leadership. We should put more stock in their true character than in their ability and external appearance (1 Tim. 3:1-7).”<sup>6</sup>

Adonijah was all about self-advancement. But his scheme was overridden by God’s sovereign appointment.

### **Sovereign Appointment (vv. 11-40)**

<sup>11</sup> Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, “Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it? <sup>12</sup> Now therefore come, let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. <sup>13</sup> Go in at once to King David, and say to him, ‘Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, “Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne”? Why then is Adonijah king?’ <sup>14</sup> Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words.”

<sup>15</sup> So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber (now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was attending to the king).<sup>16</sup> Bathsheba bowed and paid homage to the king, and the king said, “What do you desire?” <sup>17</sup> She said to him, “My lord, you swore to your servant by the Lord your God, saying, ‘Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.’<sup>18</sup> And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it. <sup>19</sup> He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army, but Solomon your servant he has not invited. <sup>20</sup> And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. <sup>21</sup> Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders.”

<sup>22</sup> While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in.

<sup>23</sup> And they told the king, “Here is Nathan the prophet.” And when he came in before the king, he bowed before the king, with his face to the ground. <sup>24</sup> And Nathan said, “My lord the king, have you said, ‘Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne’? <sup>25</sup> For he has gone down this day and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. And behold, they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’ <sup>26</sup> But me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited. <sup>27</sup> Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not told your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?”

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Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Then King David answered, "Call Bathsheba to me." So she came into the king's presence and stood before the king. <sup>29</sup> And the king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, <sup>30</sup> as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,' even so will I do this day."

<sup>31</sup> Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

<sup>32</sup> King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." So they came before the king. <sup>33</sup> And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. <sup>34</sup> And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the trumpet and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' <sup>35</sup> You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." <sup>36</sup> And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, "Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, say so."

<sup>37</sup> As the Lord has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David."

<sup>38</sup> So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule and brought him to Gihon. <sup>39</sup> There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" <sup>40</sup> And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.

- 1 Kings 1:11-40

What we see in this section is God's sovereignty working through human agency. Adonijah's power play is *reported* and *resolved* by those loyal to King David, and eventually by David himself. But no one plays a more critical role than Nathan, who wants what's best for the kingdom. Nathan is David's friend, but as he has already proven, he is first and foremost the Lord's servant. And the Lord had promised that Solomon would sit on the throne (1 Chron. 22:9-10; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-13).

Nathan works with Bathsheba to bring this matter to David's attention. Respectfully, Bathsheba reminds David of his promise that Solomon would be king – a promise that David had made based on the Lord's promise. Then Bathsheba informs David, "And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, don't know about it." Once again we see David's frailty. He's not only *impotent*, but he's also *ignorant*. The king who had once been praised as having "wisdom like that of the angel of God, and knows everything that is happening in the land" (2 Sam. 14:20 NET), now has no clue what's been going on in his land. The situation is serious and extremely urgent. Not only is the kingdom in jeopardy, but so are the lives of David's loved ones. Bathsheba closes her appeal by saying, "And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you" (v. 20a). It's time for David to act. Nathan confirms Bathsheba's report and assures David of his support that of other loyal servants, including Zadok the priest and Benaiah, the captain of the guard. Most importantly, the Lord himself is with David and will not fail him.

In the midst of his impotence, ignorance, and impaired condition, David clings to God's promise and proves it by publicly naming Solomon as his successor. David says, "He shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." Benaiah thunders out an "amen!" and says, "May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so declare it. As the Lord was with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!" (1 Kings 1:36-37 NIV). Benaiah lived up to his name, which means "the LORD will build." David's pronouncement is followed by a magnificent coronation. All the people exclaim, "Long live King Solomon!" The celebration is so intense that the "the earth was split by their noise."

Scripture says that the earth will split once again when Christ Jesus, the King of kings, returns to earth with a magnificence that defies the imagination. "Everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26 NLT). The celebration of God's people on that day will make Solomon's coronation look like a kid's birthday party. The prophet Zechariah declared, "On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem," and "the LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name" (Zechariah 14:8, 9 NIV)

"God's salvation will transform the heavens and the earth ... There will be a new creation.... This day will bring a supply of living water to the world.... The climax will be God's kingship over all the earth, with his name honored exclusively."<sup>7</sup> John Woodhouse wrote,

The crowds following Solomon into Jerusalem were on the right side of history. Why? Because God's promise will determine the future. Strangely, that does not exclude human activity. Those who believed God's promise (such as Nathan, Bathsheba, and David) did not passively wait around for God's promise to be realized. They acted boldly, carefully, and emphatically for what God had promised. That is what faith is like, and it puts you on the right side of history. ... Faith in Jesus Christ means believing God's promise. The kingdom of the son of David will be "forever" (2 Samuel 7:16; see Luke 1:33; Hebrews 1:8; Revelation 11:15). Are you on the right side of history?<sup>8</sup>

This takes us to the final portion of our text and the last point of the sermon:

### **Settled Arrangement (vv. 41-53)**

<sup>41</sup> Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, "What does this uproar in the city mean?" <sup>42</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came. And Adonijah said, "Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news." <sup>43</sup> Jonathan answered Adonijah, "No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king,<sup>44</sup> and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Chere-

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<sup>7</sup> *NIV Grace & Truth Study Bible*, gen. ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 1276.

<sup>8</sup> Woodhouse, 64.

thites and the Pelethites. And they had him ride on the king's mule. <sup>45</sup> And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon, and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard. <sup>46</sup> Solomon sits on the royal throne. <sup>47</sup> Moreover, the king's servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, 'May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne.' And the king bowed himself on the bed. <sup>48</sup> And the king also said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it.'"

<sup>49</sup> Then all the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way. <sup>50</sup> And Adonijah feared Solomon. So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. <sup>51</sup> Then it was told Solomon, "Behold, Adonijah fears King Solomon, for behold, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'" <sup>52</sup> And Solomon said, "If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." <sup>53</sup> So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, "Go to your house."

- 1 Kings 1:41-53

In one defining moment Adonijah went from feasting to fearing for his life. What caused this sudden 180-degree turn? *Reality*. You see, up to this point, Adonijah imagined himself to be king. He thought that he was calling the shots, that he had all the pieces in place, that he had everything under control. But he was dead wrong and was now forced to deal with it. He did so by taking hold of the horns of the altar.

The horns protruded from the four corners at the top of the altar of sacrifice (Ex. 27:2). After the priest slaughtered the sacrificial animal on the altar, he smeared its blood on all four horns. Psalm 118:27 says, "The Lord is God and has given us light. Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar."

From this verse we see that they tied the animal down using a rope or cord to hold it in place to slaughter it. This may seem like a cruel thing to do, but God had a purpose in it. It was to show the people the awfulness of their sin and that they deserved to die. But in his mercy, God allowed an animal to be sacrificed as their substitute. Since the altar was a place of mercy for penitent sinners, grasping the horns of the altar became a way of seeking asylum, even though such an act was not prescribed in the Old Testament law.

The man who had arrogantly "exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king'" (1 Kings 1:5) now desperately clung to the horns of the altar. Verse 50 says, "Adonijah feared Solomon." Adonijah didn't fear Solomon before. What made the difference? *Reality*. The fact was, Solomon was king, not Adonijah, and Adonijah's life was now in Solomon's hands. So, Adonijah had no alternative but to beg for mercy.

This historical account in 1 Kings 1 illustrates a far greater reality and is a shadow of things to come. This text teaches a vital lesson that transcends time and culture. It's a lesson we all must learn, and that lesson is this:

***Rebel-sinners stand in need of mercy  
from the rightful King.***

And that King is Jesus. The truth is, we are all naturally Adonijahs at heart. We have all rebelled against the one true King – the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of exalting him, we have exalted ourselves. Instead of honoring him, we have pursued our own pleasures.

Yet King Jesus did for us something that Solomon never did, or could do, for Adonijah. This King went to the cross and offered himself as the perfect and complete sacrifice for the sins of the world – the sacrifice to which all the Old Testament sacrifices pointed. The four horns to which the priest tied each limb of the lamb represented Jesus' death on the cross, where he was bound with nails, his hands and feet being pierced for us. But it wasn't the nails that held Jesus there. It was his love for us and for God the Father who loved the world by sending his Son to suffer the punishment that we deserved so that we could receive God's mercy instead of his justice.

For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:9-11 CSB

### Conclusion

In closing, want to leave you with three words of application in light of the text we have encountered today.

#### **A Word of Comfort**

We're all aging, and unless we're alive when the Lord returns, we all – like David – will grow old and die. We will not have lived up to our aspirations. We will not complete all that we set out to accomplish. We will have regrets and be mindful of our failures. But remember and be comforted by this: *Your identity isn't bound up in what you did or what you can do. Your identity is who God has made you to be in Christ.* You are not your gifts. It's not what you bring to the table but what God has set before you on his table – *Life with Christ*. "What should give us great joy in our living, and in our dying, is our relationship with God through Christ (2 Cor. 4:16-18)."<sup>9</sup> When David had nothing left but the *promises* and *presence* of God, they were enough. They were enough for David, and they will be more than enough for you. The Lord assures his people in Isaiah 46:4,

I will be your God throughout your lifetime—  
until your hair is white with age.  
I made you, and I will care for you.  
I will carry you along and save you.

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<sup>9</sup> Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Kings*, 7.

## **A Word of *Caution***

Regarding others: Don't be impressed by outward appearances. Judge a man by his character, not by his looks, skills, or giftedness.

Regarding yourself: "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." Do you respect the leaders that God has placed over you, or do you always have to be the one in charge? Do you consider others to be more significant than yourself? Do you surround yourself with people who tell you what you need to hear or only those who tell you what you want to hear? Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:5: "The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished." "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you" (1 Peter 5:6).

## **The Word of the *Cross***

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18 EHV).

Earlier we talked about the horns of the altar. The Hebrew word for horn is *qeren*, which can refer to an animal horn or an instrument and can also signify strength.

Most of us have seen a buck with antlers, which are kind of like horns. When an eight or more-point antler rack circles the head of a deer, it appears as its crown. The buck's points represent not only his age but also his strength and majesty.

The Hebrew word for "horn," *qeren*, is the origin of our English word *crown*. In ancient times, a crown was made of "horns" and the pointed tips of the crowns we're familiar with today represent those horns.

The Roman guards pressed on Jesus' head not a crown of *horns* but a crown of *thorns*. They did this to torture him and to mock him as a king. But in the book of Revelation we see Jesus wearing many crowns because he is the King of kings.<sup>10</sup>

Sooner or later every human being will bow before God's king. Only those who have truly embraced Jesus as their Savior-King will receive mercy and be on the right side of history and eternity.

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Stephanie Pavlantos' article, "What Is the Significance of the Horns of the Altar?" Christianity.com [online]. Retrieved on 09-02-23 from [https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-the-significance-of-the-horns-of-the-altar.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-the-significance-of-the-horns-of-the-altar.html#google_vignette).