



There's much wisdom in Solomon's instructions to his son, which Solomon learned from his father David. We're to learn them as well. "Get wisdom! Get insight!" With this in mind, let us turn to 2 Samuel 23 (p. 257, pew Bible). This chapter begins with an eye-catching statement: "Now these are the last words of David" (v. 1a).

There's something significant about a person's last words. A week after our family moved to Webster in June of 2011, I left to go on a previously scheduled study trip to England. One of the most memorable moments of that trip was when a small group of us students huddled together with our seminary professor in the tiny bedroom of the famous 18th century evangelist John Wesley. As we stood right next to his bed on which he died, our professor reminded us of Wesley's final words, which he repeated twice before he died. Wesley said, "The best of all is, God is with us! The best of all is, God is with us!"

The last words of John Wesley were full of faith and assurance. The same is true of the last words of David – both in his *final public address* to Israel in 2 Samuel 23, and also his *final private charge* to his son and successor Solomon in 1 Kings 2. In both cases David focuses not so much on the past or even the present but on what God will do in the future. That's a great theme to kick off a new year.

The other day I read an article that said, "September is the new January." In many ways September signifies a fresh beginning because it's the end of summer, the start of the school year and the beginning of fall activities. September is essentially "reset month." As we launch into another year and look to the future, we can benefit greatly from the last words of David. His final words can bring about a fresh beginning for us.

So, let's start by reading 2 Samuel 23:1-7, where we find David's final public address.

The Public Address 2 Samuel 23:1-7

- ¹ 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:
- ² "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me;
his word is on my tongue.
- ³ The God of Israel has spoken;
the Rock of Israel has said to me:
When one rules justly over men,
ruling in the fear of God,

⁴ 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.
⁵ “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?
⁶ But worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away,
 for they cannot be taken with the hand;
⁷ but the man who touches them
 arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear,
 and they are utterly consumed with fire.”

- 2 Samuel 23:1-7

David introduces his final address to Israel as “the oracle of David.” An oracle is a divine message delivered to man, usually in response to a request for guidance.¹ David is passing on to the people what the Spirit of the Lord, the God of Israel, the Rock of Israel has declared (v. 3a). We should pay careful attention to David’s last words because they are the *Lord’s* words.

Verses 1-3 are the preamble to the main message. David begins with his humble roots, referring to himself as “the son of Jesse.” David was the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons, who watched over his father’s sheep in the outlying fields of the little town of Bethlehem. But this boy became “the man who was raised on high.” The NIV says he was “exalted by the Most High.” Either translation makes sense, because God is the one who exalted David, who became even more than a great man. He was “the anointed [the messiah] of the God of Jacob.” This takes us back to 1 Samuel 16 – when we were first introduced to David – when the prophet Samuel “anointed him.... And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13).

This LORD was none other than “the God of Jacob,” the grandson of Abraham who was also named *Israel*. So, “Jacob” is an alternative name for the nation Israel. But another reason why David’s designation of the LORD as “the God of Jacob” is significant is that God promised Jacob, “kings shall come from your own body” (Gen. 35:11). David and his descendants were a fulfillment of God’s covenant with Jacob.

The Lord raised David up and had been David’s “rock” – “the rock of [his] salvation” (22:47) and “the Rock of Israel.” The Lord had revealed himself to David. He had spoken to David. He had given David a vital message that David now declares to the people in his final public address. The core of the message is a key principle recorded in verses 3-4, and that principle is this:

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

¹ “Oracle,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (1915), Bible Study Tools [online]. Retrieved on 08 Sept 2023 from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/oracle.html>.

*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.*

The first two lines are the most important and are quite pithy in Hebrew.² They literally read this way:

*Ruler over mankind – righteous!
Ruler – fear of God!*

- “Ruler” represents a Hebrew word that occurs nowhere else in the books of Samuel. The term focuses less on the person of the ruler and more on the rule itself, as indicated by the lines that follow.
- This rule will be over all mankind (Hebrew *adam*). Just as David understood the Lord’s promise in 2 Samuel 7 to be “instruction for mankind” (7:19), so David speaks here of a ruler whose dominion will embrace all humanity.
- This ruler will be “righteous.” Throughout history the human race has had many rulers, yet very few could be called righteous – and none of them perfectly so. For a time David’s reign was described in this way. Second Samuel 8:15 says, “David reigned over all Israel and did what was just and right for all his people.” But that was before David fornicated with Bathsheba and killed her husband Uriah. With that stain on his record, it’s hard to regard even David’s rule as “righteous.”
- This ruler will be marked by the “fear of God.” His kingdom will be characterized by a pervasive grasp of God’s greatness, his holiness, his majesty and glory.

When Ruthie and I were on vacation at Edisto Beach in South Carolina a month ago, we got up early one morning while it was still dark, drove to the beach, and waited for the sun to rise. We were not disappointed. It was beautiful. Here in 2 Samuel 23:4, “the promised ruler is likened to the brilliance of the sun rising on a cloudless morning. His rule is like the sun’s warmth joined with the rain, bringing forth abundant and lush growth. It’s a picture of blessing in terms reminiscent of Genesis 1.”³

“It is a wonderful picture ... a delightful dream.”⁴ But is it too good to be true? No, for it is directly tied to God’s “everlasting covenant” with David, and David had already tasted the Lord’s goodness. Yet the best was yet to come, for the Lord had guaranteed that the throne of David’s kingdom would be established forever by one of his descendants.

That descendant was none other than Jesus, who is called “the Son of David.” He is the righteous Ruler spoken of here – the ultimate King whom David foreshadowed. At the beginning of the New Testament book of Romans, Paul says that he was commissioned by God as an apostle and was sent out to preach the Good News. Paul then says,

² John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come. Preaching the Word*, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 523.

³ *Ibid.*, 524.

⁴ *Ibid.*

God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Romans 1:3-4 NLT

In 2 Samuel 23:5, David says, "Will [God] not bring about my whole salvation and my every desire?" (CSB). God surely did! Just as we are saved by looking back at what happened in history, believing that Christ died on the cross for the sins of humanity and was raised on the third day by the power of the Holy Spirit so that all who trust in Christ for salvation will be forgiven and have eternal life, so David looked forward to the coming of Christ and his saving work. Here is a man with holy optimism! A man with hope! David's "confidence about the future was formed and nourished by God's promise."⁵

Is yours? This summer I read the biography of Adoniram Judson, the first American foreign missionary. Despite languishing in a Burmese dungeon for nearly two years – suffering from fever, malnutrition and torture – and losing his first two wives and multiple children in death, Adoniram declared, "The future is as bright as the promises of God."

Adoniram said this as a man who already looked back on the historic reality of Jesus' death and resurrection and was already trusting in Christ as his Savior. But Adoniram was also looking forward by faith to the future, knowing God would keep his promises.

This is not to say that Adoniram's faith never faltered. After the death of his first wife, Adoniram sunk into deep depression, went off into the jungle by himself for months, and even sat for days next to an open grave that he had dug. But even during that darkest hour, he was sustained by "future grace." That's a term coined by John Piper, who says,

I don't just mean grace that comes to us in the distant future, like at the Second Coming. Clearly that is coming. It is referred to in 1 Peter 1:13, that we are to hope fully in the grace that is coming to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. So there is going to be great grace for us at the Judgment Day because we believe in Jesus. What I have in mind when I say "future grace" is the grace we'll receive at the Second Coming *and* the grace that is arriving every moment as I move into the future. ...

So future grace is God's power, provision, mercy, and wisdom – everything we need – in order to do what he wants us to do five minutes, five weeks, five months, five years, and five thousand years from now.⁶

If that doesn't get you juiced, I don't know what will! Proverbs 10:24: "What the wicked dreads will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted." If you have embraced Jesus as your King, you can be sure that God "will bring about [your] whole salvation and [your] every desire." In Christ we find not only "strong encouragement" (Heb. 6:18) but also a stellar example of leadership.

⁵ Ibid., 526.

⁶ John Piper, "What Do You Mean By 'Future Grace'?" *Desiring God*, 15 September 2008 [online]. Retrieved on 09 September 2023 from <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-do-you-mean-by-future-grace>.

If you want to exercise authority well – whether as a parent in the home, as a pastor or ministry leader in the church, as a teacher in the classroom, as a politician in the public square, as a corporate executive in the business world, as captain of a sports team, then take your cue from Jesus.

1. Use the authority you are given.
2. Use your authority in the fear of God.
3. Use your authority in humility.
4. Use your authority for the good of those you lead.
5. Use your authority for the glory of God.⁷

And when you fall short of God’s righteous standard, which you will, rejoice that Jesus has met that standard for you and will restore, renew and refresh all who trust in him.

That’s good news – the best news in all the world! But it’s not all that David declares. His final public address ends on a negative note, which I’ll read in a slightly modernized translation. In verses 6 and 7 David says, “But the godless are like thorns to be thrown away, for they tear the hand that touches them. One must use iron tools to chop them down; they will be totally consumed by fire.” This ominous ending completes the picture of the righteous Ruler, who *brings both blessing and judgment*.

***The righteous King’s rule brings
both blessing and judgment.***

Throughout the course of King David’s life, he encountered a number of godless men, “worthless men” – most recently Sheba (20:1). Such men oppose God and his king, and they will go down in flames. Their doom is inescapable, for they will be judged by the universal righteous Ruler who rules in the fear of God.

This mix of blessing and judgment is evident not only in David’s final public address to Israel but also in his final private charge to Solomon.

**The Private Charge
(1 Kings 2:1-9)**

(First Kings 2 is on page 261 in the pew Bible.) The chapter begins on a somber note: “When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, ‘I am about to go the way of all the earth’” (1 Kings 2:1-2a). Earlier in life, David had testified in one of his psalms to the Lord, “My times are in your hands” (Psalm 31:15). Solomon would later write in the book of Ecclesiastes, “There is a time for everything ... a time to be born and a time to die” (Eccl. 3:1a, 2a). The time had come for David to die, and he knew it. We all know that we’re going to die. Even children know it.

⁷ Adapted from Mark Dever’s article, “Only Use Authority in the Fear of God,” *9Marks*, 29 August 2022 [online]. Retrieved on 09 September 2023 from <https://www.9marks.org/article/only-use-authority-in-the-fear-of-god/>.

In his book, *The Conviction to Lead*, Albert Mohler begins the chapter titled “The Leader and Death” by telling us that his family’s favorite summer movie is *What about Bob?*, the comedy starring Bill Murray and Richard Dreyfuss. One of the movie’s most interesting characters is Sigggy, and eleven-year-old named for his father’s hero, Sigmund Freud. Sigggy is incredibly thoughtful for an eleven-year-old, and at a crucial point in the movie, Sigggy – who is always dressed in black from head to toe – says to Bob, “You’re going to die. I’m going to die. It’s going to happen.”

Sigggy is right. We are all going to die. Christians understand that death is the result of human sin and is the final enemy defeated by Christ. But as long as this age continues, death comes to us all. Cemeteries are still popular – everyone’s dying to get in. But seriously, the cemeteries continue to fill. Mohler, who keeps a model of a human skull on the corner of his desk as a reminder of his own mortality, writes, “What does this have to do with leadership? Everything. ... We lead with the knowledge that our time is limited, and that someone will inevitably take over for us.”⁸

That’s what’s going on with David here in 1 Kings 2. He’s about to die, and Solomon is about to take over as king. Solomon has already been anointed as king and has been co-reigning with David ever since the coronation ceremony in the previous chapter.

⇒ By the way, David Davies sent me an email earlier this week with a video clip of the coronation of King Charles III. The choir sang an anthem called Zadok the Priest that’s based on the biblical account of Zadok anointing Solomon as king. The anthem was written by George Frideric Handel (who wrote *Messiah*) and has been used in every British coronation since the late 1700s.

“When David’s time [lit., “days] to die drew near,” God’s promise was still on his mind. For the Lord had said,

“When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom.”

- 2 Samuel 7:12 NIV

We’re not sure how old Solomon was when he became king, but considering that he reigned forty years, it’s reasonable to assume that he was still a youth at this point. Earlier in our service, brother Kevin read Proverbs 4, where Solomon gives instructions to his sons and says,

When I was a son with my father, tender and precious to my mother,
he taught me and said, “Your heart must hold on to my words.
Keep my commands and live.”

- Proverbs 4:3-4 CSB

⁸ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 200.

Last week we saw in 1 Kings 1 that David never disciplined his fourth son, Adonijah. Solomon was David's tenth son, so he was a child when Adonijah was an adult. It may well be that as David witnessed the effects of his failure to raise his son Adonijah in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, David was determined to do right by Solomon. The commands David gives on his deathbed to Solomon are the culmination of commands and instructions that he had been giving to his son for some time. In verses 2-5 he says,

² "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man,
³ and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn,
⁴ that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

- 1 Kings 2:2-5

The year I graduated from high school, the rock band Boston released their album *Third Stage*, which included a song titled "What Does It Take To Be a Man?" Well, David gives the answer right here. To be a man, obey God's Word. "The Word makes the man."⁹ The benefit of obeying God's word is that you will have success in everything you do. Not necessarily in the world's eyes, but in God's eyes, and that's what counts (Ps. 1:1-3).

In verse 4, David says that if Solomon obeys God's Word, not only will he have *personal blessing*, but he will also have a *perpetual dynasty*. Going by what David says here, the continuity of the dynasty depended on obedience to God's word. But elsewhere God's promise was unconditional. He guaranteed that the throne of David's kingdom would be established forever. So, how do we make sense of this? Dale Davis provides a helpful, succinct answer, saying, "the unfaithfulness or disobedience of Solomon would not negate [God's] promise to David; but ... there will be no *enjoyment* of the blessedness of that promise unless a king remains faithful."¹⁰ We find the same sort of teaching in the New Testament. Jesus said, "Everyone ... who hears these words of mind and *does* them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt. 7:24). Dale Davis writes, "Whether it is the Davidic king or the disciple of Jesus, true stability only comes through obedience to the Lord's commands."¹¹ Good works are not the *root* of salvation, but they are the *fruit* of salvation (see Eph. 2:8-10). For this reason Tony Merida writes,

Build your life on the Word of God and worship the hero of the Word: Jesus.
 What a King we have! Sin is our attempt to make ourselves king; salvation is in Christ, the King substituting Himself for His servants. He lived the life we could not live and died the death we should have died. Now He is the risen and reigning exalted Lord. Glorify and enjoy Him.¹²

⁹ Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Kings*, eds. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 13.

¹⁰ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002, reprinted 2020), 27.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Merida, 14.

Obedience is not easy. That's why David says, "Be strong, and show yourself a man." It takes courage to do what is right. This kind of strength can only come from the Lord. That's why Paul says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10). Solomon's commitment to the word of God would require him to administer justice – rewarding those who do good and punishing those who do evil. This responsibility is laid out in the last part of David's charge, in verses 5-9. For the sake of better readability, I'm going to read them in the New Living Translation (NLT):

⁵ "And there is something else. You know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me when he murdered my two army commanders, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He pretended that it was an act of war, but it was done in a time of peace, staining his belt and sandals with innocent blood. ⁶ Do with him what you think best, but don't let him grow old and go to his grave in peace. ⁷ "Be kind to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead. Make them permanent guests at your table, for they took care of me when I fled from your brother Absalom. ⁸ "And remember Shimei son of Gera, the man from Bahurim in Benjamin. He cursed me with a terrible curse as I was fleeing to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan River, I swore by the Lord that I would not kill him. ⁹ But that oath does not make him innocent. You are a wise man, and you will know how to arrange a bloody death for him."

- 1 Kings 2:5-9 NLT

In commenting on these verse, John Woodhouse writes,

These are David's very last recorded words in the epic history of his life that began in 1 Samuel 16 – surely one of the greatest stories every told. Are you disappointed? Do you feel that it would have been nicer if David's last words were more generous, less severe? ...

However uncomfortable we may feel with this, it should remind us that God's promised king will bring justice. David was right to see this. We too must see that "the Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Praise God, there is more to the glorious gospel of God than this, but there is not less.¹³

***The righteous King's rule brings
both blessing and judgment.***

So, "build your life on the Word of God and worship the hero of the Word: Jesus."¹⁴ This takes us to the final verses of our text and the last point of today's sermon:

¹³ John Woodhouse, *1 Kings: Power, Politics, and the Hope of the Word*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018) 88.

¹⁴ Merida, 14.

The Promised Kingdom (1 Kings 2:10-12)

¹⁰ Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹ And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

- 2 Kings 2:10-12

God kept his promise, and the kingdom of Solomon, David's son, was firmly established. Solomon's kingdom was a taste of the ultimate kingdom to come. In fact, that kingdom has already commenced. Jesus declared,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- Matthew 28:18-20

At the end of this age, the kingdom of Christ will come in all its fullness, and of that kingdom there will be no end. Those who yield to King Jesus now taste the goodness of the Lord and his kingdom, even as we look forward to the day when his reign will be revealed in all its glory. This reminds me of an old Steve Green song, the chorus of which seems to be a fitting close for this sermon and this series:

When His kingdom comes
What a difference!
When things are in earth
As they are in heaven,
When all has been settled
And my heart is His throne,
Oh what a difference
When His kingdom comes!