

David's Epitaph

2 Samuel 23:1-39

The Twenty-Fourth Sermon on Second Samuel

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We live in a time when it seems there is a serious vacuum of leadership. And I'm not just speaking of national politics, but in every realm including our lives. We need true leaders, don't we? I've even read online Christians touting Vladimir Putin as a leader they could live under. My response is to go ask Christians under his rule what they think? In some respects I think this is a feeling every generation feels because we all recognize that good leaders don't just grow on trees.

David is coming to the end of his life and he's looking to the future. What kind of leader do they need? What ideal should they hold their leaders up to? Here in 2 Samuel 23 we have what are called **the last words of David**. Now, critical scholars and popular anti-Christian propaganda look at these words and say, "You see, the Bible is wrong once again!" Why? Because David's actual last words recorded in Scripture come in the next book of 1 Kings chapter 2, where he gives his deathbed speech to Solomon. So what gives? 2 Samuel 23 gives us David last public utterance, his last prophet word to the church before he dies. The Bible doesn't get it wrong.

And David's last words speak about the issue of true leadership. I want to focus with you on verses 1–5, which look back upon David's life but most importantly look forward to Israel's life to come. We see three things here about true leaders:

1. *A True Leader is Raised Up by God*
2. *A True Leader Rules in the Fear of God*
3. *A True Leader Reaches into a Future from God*

May the Holy Spirit lead us into the truth of his Word today.

A True Leader is Raised Up by God

David's final words celebrate that *a true leader is raised up by God*. At the end of his life David reminds us of where his life began: he is **the son of Jesse** (v. 1). All the way back in 1 Samuel we read about David being the eighth and last son of Jesse. And he was from the insignificant town of Bethlehem. But from that low, insignificant place he became **the man who was raised on high** (v. 1).

Every Presidential election year or so I go online and pull up a list of U.S. Presidents. I like to read about where these men were born, who their parents were, and what their lives were like. It's so amazing. We've had Presidents who literally came from nothing. We've had Presidents who were self-educated. We've had Presidents whom we look at now and say, "There's no way he'd get any votes in our television age." Yet, the highest office in our land has been attainable. If there's just one lesson our current President teaches us all, especially us kids today,

it's that anyone can be President; anyone can do anything in our great country.”

Well, David here is ultimately a beautiful picture to us of Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem but raised in Nazareth. And what did they say of Nazareth? “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” One of the ironies of the Christian religion is that the King of the universe was humbled in life; he who reigns from heaven was born in obscurity; he who conquers the world does so by his Word.

The Lord raised this David up to be a prophet as he describes this poem as an **oracle**, that is, a word from the Lord. And notice in verse 2 that he says, “**The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue.**”

The Lord raised this David up to be **the anointed of the God of Jacob**. He was the Messiah, the Christ, for his time.

The Lord raised this David up to be a psalmist. He soothed Saul's madness and he leaves songs, prayers, and meditations behind for Israel.

In all this he was raised up by God himself for that generation.

A True Leader Rules in the Fear of God

David speaks of himself here but also into the future for all Israel's kings that *a true leader rules in the fear of God*: “**When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God**” (v. 3). Was David always just? No. We've seen him fly off the handle at times. Has David always ruled in the fear of God? Don't forget Bathsheba and Uriah!

The general tenor of David's rule was just and was in the fear of God, but he's also speaking here ideally of the true king. Later on the prophets pick up on this and speak of the Messiah like this: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness" (Isa. 9:7).

By now, I hope you realize that the world we live in is full of injustice. We who know Jesus Christ's reign of justice need to be known as those who stand up for justice, not vengeance. We need to work as dual citizens of the heavenly kingdom as well as this earthly kingdom to support and elect just rulers among us. We need to remind our fellow citizens and rulers of what true justice looks like. And when we do all that and injustice still happens—which it will until Jesus returns—all the injustice of the world should make us long for the new heavens and new earth "wherein righteousness dwells."

Now notice the blessings of a true leader who rules in the fear of God. David describes a true leader as the light of the world, "**he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning**" and he describes a true leader as the source of life, "**like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth**" (v. 4). There's just something about the sun shining here in San Diego almost every day of the year that does something to us, isn't there? When you're lazy, get outside; when you're depressed, get outside. Pretty much the answer to a lot around here is, get outside. And those of us who have lawns, there's nothing quite like rain to green them up faster than sprinkling and fertilizing.

Prophetically, David is speaking of the reality we have in Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world and the in whom is life.

A True Leader Reaches into a Future from God

Finally, notice that David's words are not just about himself or ideally of Israel's kings, but are prophetic. He says here that *a true leader reaches into a future from God*. He speaks in verse of what God has already promised and who that will come true in the future:

**“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?”** (v. 5)

He's referring here back to the covenant the Lord made with him and his house in 2 Samuel 7. Do you remember that story? David desired to build a house for the Lord, a literal temple. Yet the Lord turned the tables on David and said, “No, I will be the one who builds you a ‘house,’ that is, a family dynasty.” And so the Lord spoke of David dying and then the Lord raising up a successor, whom we know was Solomon. Solomon would build the temple, but most importantly, the Lord said, “I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:13).

Now we know that Solomon died too. And we know that when he died his kingdom was divided. And we know that the book of Kings is nothing but a Greek tragedy, with a few glimmers of hope. But David is a prophet. And his words speak well into the future. Have you ever heard the illustration of what the prophets saw

when they prophesied? Think of it like this. When you're driving east towards the hills and then the mountains, what you see initially is a peak, and you think, "Wow, that's far away and it's tall." But then as you get closer you begin to see that peak become two, with one smaller in front of it and then another mountain well behind it rising up. The prophets prophesied things that were close and things that were far off. They spoke of what was going to happen in their day but then of what would come after that, like seeing one mountain in front but then realizing that there was yet another in the distance.

Conclusion

True leadership. It's so hard to find, isn't it? Yet, it's also not so hard. Jesus is the true leader. He was raised up by God in his incarnation, he ruled and still rules in the perfect fear of God, and he is the one who was given in the future, from David's vantage point. And he is the one who will come again to this world in the future before us.

One application for us in the church is this. When we are disappointed by our church leaders, remember Jesus Christ is the only perfect leader. Pray for us, be patient with us, and realize that he leads through us until he comes again.

Amen.