

The Last Words of a Righteous Life

2 Sam 22-23

KV 23:5 “Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secure in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?”

We are coming to the end of 2 Samuel, and today we will begin the study of David's final days. Today we will look at the last words of David. The last words of a person's life are significant, because it may represent a brief summary of your entire life. Michael Jordan's last shot summarized his career as one of basketball's greatest players. In the movie Braveheart, the character William Wallace's last words were, “Freedom!!!” Have you thought about your last words? Even if you're young, the sooner you think about your legacy, the greater it will be. David's last words reflected a hope in God's promise – salvation through Jesus Christ. Charles Spurgeon's last words at his church began and ended with Jesus Christ. They were looking forward to something greater, they were looking to heaven, and their last words reflected both their lives and their hope. Now as we look at a summary of David's life, may we be encouraged to live a life of faith, hope and love, so that our last words will ring with all those things.

Part I: A Royal Hymn of Thanksgiving

In Ch.22, v1, it reads, “David sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.” It's not clear when he wrote this – whether he was young and running from Saul, or if he was old and reflecting back on his life. This song is also Psalm 18, with minor variations. David had intended this psalm to be sung on other occasions by his people. I have called this part, “a royal hymn,” since it was used in David's courts, but also to emphasize the hymn's significance - it is one of the most beautiful expressions of thankfulness to God. It is a standard we can use to measure up to in terms of our own praise to the Lord.

The psalm can be divided into 5 parts: the introduction (v.2-4), God's power to deliver (v.5-20), God's righteousness (v.21-30), a repetition of God's power to deliver (v.31-50), and finally a messianic hope (v.51). Look at v.2-3, “the Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior – from violent men you save me.” David was constantly in danger from those who would kill him – he had to flee from Saul twice for his life, and he found some safety in a cave, also called a rock. But more than a rock, the Lord was his security and his safety. In this life we are constantly under attack from sin and temptation. The devil will shoot his arrows at us, trying to destroy our faith in God, for example when he discourages us. But just as David said, the Lord is our rock, our refuge and our shield.

The second part of David's song displays the incredible power of God to deliver. The waves of death and the torrents of destruction surrounded David. Saul threw spears at David from right across the table, and hunted him with 3000 men. The cords of the grave coiled around him, the snares of death confronted him. He lived in enemy territory, nowhere was really safe for David to go. Then in v.7 David says, “In my distress I called to the Lord; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears.” The Lord is always watching out for his children, ready and willing to save.

In the following verses, we behold the power of the Lord over nature, and over the earth. Sometimes the forces of nature can seem overwhelming. Although we cannot fathom personally the power of a 500mph tsunami, it has destroyed the city of Sendai. The recent tornadoes in the east coast have put Massachusetts in a state of emergency. In v.8, the earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook – why? Simply because the Lord was angry. Smoke rises from his nostrils and fire comes from his mouth. He opens the heavens and comes down, dark clouds are under his feet. Bolts of lightning surround his presence. A mere breath from his nostrils can part the seas. Although David did not witness these things, Moses did – once when he entered the cloud to retrieve the 10 commandments, and another time when God parted the Red Sea.

Verse 17 says, “He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.” There is no ocean too deep that the Lord cannot rescue you from, but why does he want to rescue you? Look at v. 20, “He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.” The Lord delights in his children. That is why he is so angry when his children are mistreated, but also so full of patience for his children to repent. He is full of grace, full of mercy, and full of love because he delights in the children that are his. Parents can understand this – when you see your children, you hurt when they hurt, you rejoice when they do. God loves his children.

In the third part of this psalm David sings of God’s righteousness. He says in v.21, “The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.” The sin against Uriah being the only exception, David was innocent(1 King 15:5). He was innocent when Saul accused him, he was innocent when Absalom tried to take over his kingdom, and he was innocent when the Philistines came to attack him. But what else made David righteous? Look at v.22-24, “For I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.” He never deserted God, but habitually communed with him, sitting before the Lord, praying, singing, giving thanks and writing psalms. All of God’s laws are before him. David also kept himself from sin. Twice he had the opportunity to kill his arch-enemy, Saul, but both times he denied himself and saved Saul’s life. How many of us can say that the law of God is always before us? How often do we meditate, memorize or simply enjoy Scripture and time with God?

David says in v.25, “The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight.” It is the Lord who first gives us righteousness, and it is also the Lord who rewards us for it. It is only through his son, Jesus Christ, and no other way, are we made righteous. How great, how bountiful is the kindness of our Lord, to give us righteousness, and later to reward us for it. We can never say we deserve such a thing, but by his grace he freely pours out his blessing. To the faithful, God shows himself faithful, to the blameless, he shows himself blameless, to the pure, he shows himself pure. God shows himself to us according to our faith, if we have little faith, we should only see a little bit of God. The more we come to know God, the more our faith may increase; the Bible is our source of knowledge. Even this song bears the image of God, and I pray you may come to know him more through it, and increase your faith. To the crooked, God will not show himself crooked, but shrewd. Remember Ahithophel, who counseled Absalom in the rebellion against David. He was very wise, and actually

gave wise, but evil advice. God determined, and succeeded in frustrating his counsel through Hushai. The Lord saves the humble, those who take no confidence in themselves but trust fully in him, but his eyes are on the haughty, the proud, to bring them low (v.28).

The next part of the song gives more glory to the Lord and repeats his power to deliver with specific examples. David says in v.31, “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless.” David had to learn this the hard way – when he was fleeing from Saul he tried to do things his way, he lied to the priest at Nob and as a result all the priests were slaughtered. He learned he had to trust in the word of the Lord through his prophets before the Lord delivered him. He continues to praise the Lord in v.32 “For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?” David gives the highest glory to the Lord – he is God, he is the Creator, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the Righteous, and there is only one – the Lord and God of Israel. Throughout school we may learn of many gods: the gods of Greece, the gods of Rome, the gods of India, but let us confess like David, there is only one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only God who strengthens us, makes our way perfect, trains our hands for battle, and gives us the shield of victory, as he did with David.

Through God David crushed his enemies completely, so that they could not even rise. God made them turn their backs in flight, but David pounded and trampled them like mud in the streets. When David first became king, God gave him victory on every side: to the west, the south, the north and the east. Several times David’s own people revolt against him, yet he sings, “You have delivered me from the attacks of my people; you have preserved me as head of nations (v.44).” He took David from being the enemy of his own people, back to being their ruler. God also extended that rule to foreign nations: people that he never knew feared and obeyed him.

Periodically, take a moment to recount all the things the Lord has done for you. When David did this, he came to the conclusion of this psalm: look at v.47, “The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, my Savior!” God is active, working today as powerfully as he worked in David’s time, just as in the hymn, “He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way. He lives, he lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know he lives? ... (finish the song).” Finally, David ends with a messianic hope. Let’s all read v.51: “He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever.” God shows unfailing kindness to David and his descendants forever, through the gift of salvation and eternal life through David’s son and Lord, Jesus Christ. And it is through Jesus we become descendants of David, and become recipients of the unfailing kindness of God forever.

Part II: The Last Words of David

The psalm in Ch. 22 was kind of like David’s “life testimony,” and spoke of all the things God had done for him. It was his expressive, heartfelt thanksgiving. In the beginning of Ch. 23, we have the last words of David, the final words of wisdom he wants to impart to us, so listen very carefully. His last words also sum up his life in brief, and they make up his legacy. Look at Ch.23, v1 “These 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.’” The word “oracle” means an

utterance, to say something, and it can also refer to prophecy, and in this case it is almost both. Notice how David describes his progression, from the son of Jesse, acknowledging his humble roots as a shepherd to the man exalted by the Most High. He was anointed by God to become king, but he also identifies himself as “Israel’s singer of songs.” Songs were a way to praise and teach spiritual truths about the Lord – he was Israel’s psalmist, and their spiritual leader.

David continues in v.2, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me:” These words were not David’s own, but written as he was moved and inspired by God. Some scholars suggest this could be the trinity working in him – notice the progression: The God of Israel, the Father, spoke. The Rock of Israel, the son, spoke to David. And the Spirit of the Lord spoke through David. That may be how trinity works together in us: God the Father speaks, the Son speaks to us, and the Holy Spirit speaks through us, to others. This is what the Rock of Israel said to David, “When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God.” This is wisdom to David, direct from God, passed on to us. We must live our lives in the fear of the Lord. This should be a fundamental truth in our lives. Prov 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

Let us continue with David’s wisdom from the Lord: “When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.” Our Lord speaks with the most beautiful imagery: a bright, calm, warm sunny day that dazzles and sparkles! This brings to mind feelings of peace, of joy, of life as we would always want it to be. Because the Lord gave these words to David, we could expect that this was the way in which he ruled his kingdom, with righteousness over men and the in the fear of God. If this was how he ran his kingdom, this might have also been how he ran his life.

The next verses are David’s own words, and he speaks of the promises that God has made to him. Let’s all read v.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?” David’s physical house would not be right with God. Eventually Solomon would accept pagan practices and his descendants would pursue foreign gods, but David was not talking about that house. David was talking about his house that God would establish – the everlasting kingdom based on his everlasting covenant. There, everyone in the everlasting kingdom would be right with God, and only there, could his house be right with God. Today, we can see that God’s everlasting covenant was sure, it was guaranteed, arranged and secure in every part, because God has brought to fruition David’s salvation, and established his house forever through Jesus Christ.

David also said that God would grant his every desire. This is an interesting promise, God would grant our every desire? Well, what were David’s desires? We can find them in the Psalms. Ps 27:4 says, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” Is this your desire? Listen to Psalm 73:25-26, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

For David, earth has nothing he desires besides the Lord. What is it that you want? Do you want the world? Or do you want God?

In the last of David's last words, he gives a warning (v.6) "But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand. Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie." Thorns cannot be touched or gathered with the hand. Are you like a thorn? Does your sin make you like a thorn – are you full of pride? Do you get angry easily? Are you greedy? Can the Lord touch you, or do you hate the Lord in your heart? As this verse says, the Lord will not even touch you, but will use an iron or a stick, and you will be burned up where you are. God has shown unfailing kindness to us – he desires to make the same covenant he made with David to us, but most people either don't care for it, they do not know about it, or they reject it. But Isaiah demonstrates this kindness to us:

Listen to this invitation to the thirsty, from Isaiah 55 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David...Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (Isa 55: 1-3,6,7)" Are you right with God? Is your house right with God? Turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on you. Live in the fear of the Lord. For God will make your house right, he will make an everlasting covenant with you, he will bring to fruition your salvation, and he will grant you your every desire. May the Lord's kindness lead us all to repentance.

Part III: The Fruit of David's Righteousness

The last part of Ch.23 lists the exploits and names of David's mighty men. This part gives honor to the righteous men who have given exceptional service to the king, but it is also a tribute to David, who took all of these men in, and trained them in both righteousness by his leadership, and in the art of war. Let us look at what they have become. Remember that these were part of the 400 men that came to David when he was fleeing from Saul. These were the distressed, indebted or discontented (1 Sam 22:2), in almost every sense they were weak and ordinary men, but men who followed David and fought with him side by side even before he became king

Josheb-Basshebeth was chief of an elite group of three – he killed 800 people in encounter. Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai, who valiantly fought singlehandedly against the Philistines until he was weary and his hand froze to his sword. The Lord gave him victory. The third of this elite group was Shammah, who also won a solo victory against the Philistines when his group fled.

In this translation (NIV84) it appears that a different group of three men (I'm not sure if it's the same as the Three above) overheard David longing for water, but not any ordinary water, he wanted water from the well at Bethlehem. David grew up in Bethlehem, so maybe he particularly liked the water there. It was harvest time, so at this time it was very hot. Another problem was, there was a Philistine stronghold there, and a line of Philistines guarding the city. The three mighty men really wanted to please

David, and although they were not commanded to go, they fearlessly broke through the Philistine line, retrieved water from the well, and brought it back. Look at v.17, “Far be it from me, O Lord, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it.” David, forbid himself to drink it, realizing that he inadvertently put their lives in danger for some luxury water. He valued their lives so much, that he denied himself this water, and instead, poured it out as a drink offering to the Lord. This may have also helped to prevent them from risking their lives in such a way in the future. There was a mutual love here, and this act displayed the courage and dedication of these men, who would give their lives to please the king.

Abishai, Joab’s brother, was noted for killing 300 men, and became commander of the three. Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a valiant fighter – he killed 2 of Moab’s best men, killed a lion on a snowy day, and killed a giant Egyptian with his own weapon. He became the commander of David’s personal bodyguard and eventually became Solomon’s commander in chief. The rest of the chapter lists 32 elite warriors, notice that many came from outside Israel. David’s military force, those in the service of the kingdom consisted of many nations. The list also includes Asahel, who was killed by Abner in the civil war, and at the end Uriah the Hittite. David’s sin was accentuated by the fact that he killed a man recognized for his service to the nation. Finally, you may notice the absence of Joab, either because he was the current commander over all the army, or, though he was a good soldier, lost honor because he murdered Abner (who left Israel in peace at the time) and Amasa, two of David’s friends.

Thus you can see the fruit of David’s righteousness, which made him a powerful and effective leader. Each person, because of their faith, became heroes in their own right. They were first righteous, then they became mighty. See how God can transform an ordinary person into a hero! David was just a shepherd boy, lifted up to become the world’s most powerful king. These 400 distressed, indebted, discontented men became the mighty men of Israel! You too, can be transformed from a useless sinner to a kingdom of priests – offering up sacrifices of praise to God and interceding on behalf of the lost, battling the forces of Satan and leading people into eternal life. You can be a bold witness for God, doing the impossible by faith. But first you need righteousness, and this righteousness cannot come from yourself. It comes only from the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one who gives us righteousness, and rewards us for it. Then he will make you mighty.

As we begin to wind down David’s life, we see how he gave thanks to God for his entire life. The song was kind of David’s “life testimony,” and he taught us that the Lord rewards us according to our righteousness. Then, in his last words, he taught us that one who rules righteously is like a beautiful, dazzling, warm, clear blue day. And so we can expect in heaven, where the Righteous God rules, there will be no more night, no more hunger, no more thirst, no scorching heat, no tears, but the fulfillment of our every desire – to dwell in the house of the Lord, to seek him and to gaze at his beauty, his majesty. Finally, we saw the fruit of righteousness in the transformed lives of David’s men. Through this righteousness we too are transformed. This is just the first transformation, the next will be more glorious, and eternal. All this made possible through the kindness, mercy and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. My the last words of our lives point to the great hope that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!