**David’s last words and more mighty men** 3/9/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 23:1-7, 2Samuel 23:8-39

Text: 2Samuel 23

Psalms: 146, 72:1-8, 89:1-8, 72old

‘The sweet psalmist of Israel’ is a title David claims as he writes this short poem, which the text tells us are ‘the last words of David’ (23:1). They are not his dying words, but like anyone’s last words they are reflective and solemn. In addition to describing himself as the ‘sweet psalmist of Israel’, the man whose name is on seventy three of the one hundred and fifty psalms in the psalter describes himself as ‘a man raised up on high’ or better, ‘the man exalted by the Most High’ (23:1 NIV). In a parallel line he is, ‘the anointed of the God of Jacob’.

David was indeed, the anointed of God and the greatest king of Israel, but he gave all praise and glory to God for all that he accomplished in life. We may not be kings or rulers, but let us give thanks to God for whatever we have achieved in life. As believers, our lives are in his hands. You may have medals from your school or sports club, but even as young people let us be giving thanks and praise to the Lord. You may not be able to say with David that, ‘He trains my hands for war’ (Ps 144:1), but the Lord does give you the ability, as well as the health and strength to achieve things on the sports field, in the school, in the workplace and even in church and family. If your ‘medal’ is a ‘Best Dad ever’ or ‘Best friend ever’ mug, you are a blessed person!

Following David’s ‘last words’ poem, this chapter returns to listing and describing David’s mighty men. This listing began at the end of chapter 21 with four men, including Abisahi, who bravely killed Philistine giants (21:17).

**1. David’s last words**

David was king of Israel but was also a prophet who spoke words given him by God (cf. Acts 2:30). In this poem he begins with the ‘formula’ of a prophecy in saying, ‘Thus says’ or ‘The oracle of’, although it is not, ‘Thus says the Lord’. But in verse 2 he says that, ‘The Spirit of the Lord spoke’ to him, and he goes on to tell what God said to him.

David began his last words by reflecting on where he had come from. He was the son of Jesse, the youngest son, and a shepherd boy when he first heard the Lord’s call upon his life. Everyone told him he was just a boy who could do nothing to help the cause of God’s people but God’s hand was upon David, and he trusted in God even as a boy. If you are just a boy or a girl thinking you are of no use to God, think again. And you parents, think how to encourage your son or daughter to serve the Lord even from a young age. I was listening to a talk on Jonathan Edwards and the revival in his church in Northampton in the 1730’s. Apparently a boy of four declared his faith in Jesus and became a church member!

David was older than four but was still a boy looking after his father’s sheep when he stepped out in faith, trusting in the Lord to deliver him. He was still a boy looking after sheep when Samuel anointed him king of Israel. David remembers this anointing, and how God raised him up to be king after many years of running from King Saul. David became a great warrior king, but was also a great poet. Whatever ability or gift we have, let us be seeking to use it for God’s glory, not ours!

Speaking in the first person, David tells how ‘The Spirit of the Lord’ spoke to him such that he spoke the words of the Lord. This is the ministry of a prophet. Today we have God’s words here in the Bible, so speaking these words can be seen as prophesying. Remember the formula of the prophets: ‘Thus says the Lord’. So what did the God of Israel have to say to David? The ‘Rock of Israel’ spoke words for the king. The Lord had anointed and appointed David as king. He was king under God, who was the true King of Israel. As such a king, David was to uphold justice for all people (23:3). He was not to show partiality or take bribes, and not to oppress the poor. To the extent it was humanly possible, he was to look upon the heart, knowing that at his own anointing he prophet Samuel declared, ‘The Lord looks on the heart’ (1Sam 16:7).

‘The ruler of men must be just, ruling in the fear of God’ (23:3). Such a ruler will be like a light to his people; the people saw David as ‘the lamp of Israel’ (21:7). Many kings of Israel brought darkness to the land when they turned to other gods, to partiality and immorality. Still today, people in many nations live in the shadow of ungodly rulers rather than in the light of a ruler like David. We are praying for our rulers, ‘for kings and for all in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence’’ (1Tim 2:2). Our life is to be pleasing to God, and one of praising God within this peaceable society.

Light and life are features of a kingdom ruled by a just, god-fearing king. David’s word from the Lord likened the king’s rule to the light of the morning sun, and the grass sprouting after the rain (23:4). Psalm 72 speaks of the rule of a just and righteous king in terms of light, and grass growing after rain (Ps 72:5, 6). This psalm, like this last poem written by David, speaks of a greater king than David, namely Christ the King. Writing of the ‘Word become flesh’, John says, ‘In Him was life, and the life was the light of men’ (John 1:4). Jesus is the light of the world; in him is no darkness. The kingdom of God in which Jesus is king is the kingdom of light with no darkness. Darkness is what evil people like; light is what the people of God like, and what we find in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is also life: ‘In Him was life’. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. David’s picture of grass springing up after rain is most appropriate if we picture what it was like before the rain. Grass has an amazing capacity to make ‘compensatory growth’ after drought. We see fields coming to life after drought-breaking rains. If we appreciate this regeneration of the earth after rain, let us appreciate the regenerated life the Lord gives us when we come into his kingdom and come under the reign of Jesus Christ, our saviour and Lord.

The oracle of God comes to an end in verse 4, but the messianic theme continues. A better translation of verse 5 is in the form of a rhetorical question: ‘Is not my house established by God, and has he not made with me an everlasting covenant’ (23:5 NIV). David never forgot the Lord’s anointing, and especially not the covenant the Lord declared to him after he brought the Ark to Jerusalem. He wanted to build a physical house for the Lord but the Lord said that through David, he the Lord would build a house or dynasty for his name: ‘Your throne shall be established forever’ (2Sam 7:16). A descendant of David’s, namely Jesus of Nazareth, would sit upon the throne of the kingdom of God that transcends the physical Israel. This kingdom will be, or is, one of eternal salvation, of peace and of joy in the presence of King Jesus.

God made this covenant with David at a time when ‘the Lord had given him rest from his enemies all around’ (7:1). But that rest did not last. Till the end of his life David was fighting Philistines, as this very chapter shows. But the time will come, and indeed had come in Jesus Christ our King, when evil men and rebels will be cast out like thorns. Thorny bushes cannot be gathered with bare hands; a pitch fork, or in David’s case a long spear, is needed to pick up thorns and throw them into a heap to be burned (23:7).

Thorns appeared as God’s curse upon the ground following the Fall (Gen 3:18). They appear in the parable of the sower, choking the good seed. Ultimately, they appear as a crown on the head of Jesus. Jesus bore the curse of our sin as he died in our place on the cross; another symbol of divine cursing. Because Jesus took the curse and the penalty that was ours because of our sin, we can be forgiven and be free, free to live in the glorious light of our risen saviour and King.

Meanwhile those who turn their backs on Jesus and the cross are still under God’s curse, and, like the thorns spoken of by David, will be cast out and burned, utterly burned. David is of course, speaking of divine judgment. As king, David was called upon to rule with justice and his descendant will rule with ultimate justice, casting the wicked into the unquenchable fires of hell (Mat 25:41).

**2. More mighty men**

I say, ‘More mighty men’ because we have already been told of three men who disposed of Philistine giants back in chapter 21. They are not called ‘mighty men’ but one, Abishai, appears again here in chapter 23. David was a warrior king who inspired other men to fight against the enemies of Israel. They were both able and loyal mighty men, as we will see. The list begins with three who are named, and goes on to thirty others (23:9, 13).

These mighty men are often referred to in the context of a battle at harvest time because the Philistines and others came to burn crops or plunder the harvest. Josheb-Basshebeth or Adino the Eznite is listed because he killed eight hundred men in one battle. Eleazar the son of Dado, a Benjaminite, defied the Philistines even as Israel retreated. He fought until his hand was weary and ‘frozen’ to his sword (23:9). His fellow soldiers returned to plunder the dead Philistines. The third man listed is Shammah the son of Agee. The Philistines came to a field of lentils (‘barley’ in 1Chron 11:13) chasing off the Israelites. But this mighty man stood his ground in this field, killing Philistines until they retreated. As with Eleazar, the victory of Shammah is attributed to the Lord.

The listing of mighty men is interrupted to tell of how three of ‘the thirty chief men’ went down to David at the cave of Adullam, a place west of Bethlehem towards Gath, from where David at this time was again fighting the Philistines. The Philistines had apparently taken Bethlehem, David’s home town. Whether he was simply thirsty or was longing for his home town, or both, David said with longing, ‘Oh, that someone would give me a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem!’ (23:15). This request was unreasonable and selfish, given the circumstances. It is a story however, that demonstrates the loyalty and bravery of three of David’s men, men who are not even named. These three men risked their lives to break through enemy lines and fetch water from this well at Bethlehem for David.

What happens next is even stranger than David’s request. When these three loyal men brought the water to David he would not drink it but, ‘poured it out to the Lord’ (23:16). Recognising these men had risked their lives for him, David regarded this water a too precious to drink. It was in a sense more precious than wine that was usually offered with a sacrifice. David actually called this water the blood of these loyal men because they risked their lives to get it for him (23:17). We noted that the names of these three men are not recorded in history, but they were remembered by David, and by the Lord, as loyal and selfless servants of David.

This chapter continues on, listing the names of three more mighty men who were among the thirty. Abishai the brother of Joab appears again, this time killing three hundred of the enemy; not as many as Josheb-Basshebeth in the first group of three so he did not make the first group (23:8, 18, 19). Benaiah is also known to us as the leader of David’s bodyguard or mercenaries; he is noted for, among other feats, killing an Egyptian with his own spear, and a lion in a pit (23:20, 21).

Asahel, another of Joab’s brothers, heads the list of the thirty warriors (23:24). Only twenty nine are listed, although verses 32 and 36 may refer to two each. If Joab is included, the number comes to thirty seven (23:39). The final name is well known to us and to David; Uriah the Hittite was among David’s mighty men, until David had him killed to cover up his sin.