

3. David looks to the Future

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] As we begin, one thing I want to point out to you is that the headings in Scripture, apart from the headings of the Psalms, are not inspired.

And in many ways, the last words of David is an unfortunate title for this chapter, because I'm calling this David looks to the future.

Although David is looking at the past, very much he is looking towards the future. He's a man caught up in visions of what God not only has done, but is about to do.

So keep that in mind as we go into the chapter. Two great mountaineers of last century, Mallory and Irvin, were involved in a failed attempt to conquer Everest.

So you were interested in these kind of things, we'll know that in the 1950s and so on. Before Everest was finally conquered, there were various attempts which failed.

[1 : 01] And Mallory and Irvin set out one morning from the base camp quite near the summit and disappeared into a snowstorm. And one of the Sherpas afterwards said, they were last seen going strongly for the top.

They were last seen going strongly for the top. I want to suggest to you, David here is going strongly for the top. This is not an old man wallowing in nostalgia.

It's not full of phrases like, oh in my day, or I well remember. It's full of confidence that the God who made a covenant with him, the God who begun a good work, was going to continue it and is going to complete it.

They're not literally his last words. We can read these in 1 Kings 2 verses 1-4, where he tells Solomon that he will only succeed and only prosper if he obeys the words of Moses.

Words which Solomon sadly failed. But rather, they're a kind of summing up. Basically, the Spirit of God is saying, this is what David was about.

[2 : 15] This is what his life, his career, his achievements were about. Now way back in 1 Samuel 12, Samuel had done a similar thing, giving a kind of summing up of his prophetic ministry and pointing to the future.

So here, David is a man looking to the far horizons, caught up in God's eternal plan. The title I've given to this little series is flawed but faithful.

And of course, that could apply to all God's servants. Certainly could apply to Abraham, who we'd be looking at on Sunday mornings. And here, David is looking forward. But the second thing is, it's not primarily about David.

It's about David's greater son, the Messiah, and about his reign. When you read things like the end of verse 3, when one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, 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.

Only in the kingdom to come will that be fully completed. And he's speaking of the God of the covenant. The God who makes promises and keeps them.

[3 : 32] The God who uses imperfect people to work out his perfect plan. The work which is goodness begun, as we sang a moment ago, the arm of his strength will complete.

So let's look at this chapter then under three headings. We're going first of all to look at God's choice. First verses 1 to 3, or at least the first part of verse 3.

We're going to look at God's covenant. The second part of verse 3 to verse 7. Then we're going to look at God's commendations. Verses 8 to 39.

Verses you so much enjoyed. We're going to call these God's commendation. Now first of all then, God's choice. Now notice what David is saying here.

David is not saying, I was a good guy. God saw my potential. He knew I was rather hot stuff at beating wolves and bears and lions.

[4 : 34] So he tried me out with a giant. And then, you know, I lived up to my potential. David is saying, God spoke to me. God chose me. He chose me.

Notice the word, the oracle of David. This is a word often used in the prophets. It means bird. Sometimes it means literally the load that a beast of burden carries.

The load that you put on the back of an ox. And also a message. Something you have to tell people. Because it's so important. It's God given.

In other words, David isn't just saying, this is my testimony. David is saying, this is what God has done in me. That's the problem of many testimonies, aren't they? There's an awful lot about me and not very much about God.

And the testimony becomes ever more wonderful. The conversion experience becomes ever more dramatic. And the story becomes ever longer. Now it's not like that here. David is saying, God spoke to me and God spoke by me.

[5 : 34] In other words, David is saying, God's word became flesh in me. The spirit of the Lord, verse 2, speaks by me. His word is on my tongue. And all those who speak God's word, whether it's from the pulpit or in house groups or in one-to-ones, this must be true.

It must be the word of God which becomes flesh in the person who's speaking. So David says, God chose me. Now there's two things about this choice.

First of all, he came from a very ordinary background. Verse 1 again. The son of Jesse. Now if you go back to 1 Samuel 15, you will find that that was a human family.

A very human family. If you read the next few chapters, you'll find it was full of jealousy, full of spite, full of one-upmanship. That's the kind of family David came from.

A friend of mine always used to say, all families are dysfunctional families apart from the grace of God. We've got to remember that. It's not human niceness or attractiveness.

[6 : 43] And God takes up this. But God overruled that to make him king. And there's that wonderful story, they say, back in 1 Samuel 15, where Samuel was over-impressed by the appearance of David's brothers and said, surely the right one is before me.

But eventually he came to the right conclusion. If you go further back, it didn't look likely that there was going to be a David. Read the book of Judges, the grotesque chaos of that book.

Read the last chapters of it. So appalling. You can scarcely read them in public. Gang rape, violence, idolatry on a mega scale. All these things that are leading God's people further and deeper into idolatry, into wickedness.

It didn't look like it. Nor did it seem that a Moabite-esque great-grandmother, Ruth, was going to bear the Messiah. But that's what God did. You may well feel, and you're a very remarkable person if you don't feel, that there have been circumstances in your background you would have wished could have been different.

Remember that God chose you from that background. Just as he chose David, the son of Jesse, so he has chosen you. Now we are not David.

[8 : 01] He has not chosen us to reign over Israel. We know that. Nevertheless, what is said here about God's choice of David is true of us. We have in our backgrounds the equivalent of the son of Jesse.

And God uses these in his grace. The painful things. The embarrassing things. The things we'd rather forget. As well as the things which we look to with gratitude. So God's choice is from an ordinary background.

But you'll notice that there's the extraordinary as well. He is the anointed of the God of Jacob. There is more of God than there is of Jesse, so to speak.

He is God's child. God's son. God's king. Now the anointing, once again, he was given as the king. The king of Israel. He is anointed to do that task.

The anointing speaks of the Holy Spirit of God. And in the New Testament, in the New Testament age, all of God's people are given the spirit.

[9 : 04] So that we can live for him in the world. The spirit, as Peter says in the day of Pentecost, quoting from the prophet Joel, has been poured out on all flesh. It's often been said if the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from our churches, 90% of the activity could go on.

Now that's probably true. But if it's true, it's rather disastrous, isn't it? Because it means that 90% of the activity is achieving nothing. It's only the spirit who will make us live effectively for God.

The fact that we have the spirit of God within us is a sign of God's choice of us. That's the first thing. God's choice. Choice from the son of Jesse, from an ordinary background, to become the Lord's anointed and to point to his greater son.

Remember always in interpreting the scriptures, We have to see the big picture. David is the Lord's anointed. He points to the Messiah. But what God does on a grand scale, God also does with all his people.

And that is the point. If we simply, if we personalize this, then we become imagining we are David. On the other hand, if we simply look at the big picture, then we'll distance it from us.

[10:18] The truth of the matter is, David is unique. He has his place in salvation history as the king pointing to the one who was to come. And yet, read the things the New Testament says about all believers.

A kingdom of priests. The spirit in you. And so on. So that's the first thing. God's choice. But God's choice is underlined by God's covenant.

In the 3b to 7. Notice verse 5. He has made with me an everlasting covenant. Ordered in all things and secure.

Now if we'd been doing a longer series on David, we would have looked at 2 Samuel chapter 7, which outlines that covenant. But the point I want us to remember is this.

That the covenant of God is telling us something about God from the very beginning of scripture. Because creation itself, the creating of heaven and earth, is itself a covenant.

[11:21] In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, and placed his image in that creation, placed male and female in that creation, to be his stewards, to be his vice regents, he was committing himself to finishing that task.

And every covenant is God's initiative and God's grace. Read the great covenant psalm, Psalm 136, which uses the great word covenant love.

The Hebrew word eseth is covenant love endures forever. And see how the first illustration of that is he made the day and the night. He made the great lights. So right from the very beginning.

And then after the flood, he recommits himself by making the covenant with Noah and with all creation. Then the covenant we are studying on Sunday mornings, the one with Abraham, the covenant with the man of faith.

Then the Sinai covenant with Moses. And now the covenant with David, which points to the king who will bring about the new heaven and the new earth.

[12:23] And the new covenant of which Jeremiah speaks of in his prophecy. So God's covenant with David is with David and with his house and with his descendants.

Nevertheless, God's covenant is with all of his people. Because from the very foundation of the world, indeed before the foundation of the world, he chose a people with whom he would make a covenant and who would be his agents in the world.

Now notice two things about this covenant. First of all, it's attractiveness. Verse 4. He dawns on them like the morning light. Remember I said a moment ago that creation itself is a covenant.

And that's underlined here. When God's king reigns, the morning light, which was the first act of creation, let there be light, the light which shines will be perfect and undimmed.

The rain that makes grass to sprout. The light and the life here. That's at the heart of the covenant.

Now, to a tiny extent, in some of the better days of David, and in the days of his son Solomon, if you read 1 Kings 4, for example, you'll read about how people prospered.

[13:43] There was plenty. There was peace and prosperity in Solomon's reign. There were tiny glimpses. Later on, the great reformers, Hezekiah and Josiah, gave us glimpses as well.

But only when the king came, when the king came the first time, and when the darkness fled before him, when the eyes of the blind were opened, when the lame were healed, when the dead were raised, when the deaf ears were opened, and so on.

This is the true fulfillment. And yet, the final fulfillment lies still in the future, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Indeed, the final fulfillment of this chapter is Revelation 21 and 22, that wonderful poetic description of the new heaven and the new earth.

But also remember, as the gospel is preached, and as the covenant word shines into the darkness, we see foreshadowings of this. This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, God, who commended the light to shine out of darkness, has commended the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, to shine into our hearts and to be saved.

[14:57] See what Paul is saying. When the gospel is preached, when the light of the covenant shines into darkened hearts, the kingdom is already anticipated. As men and women, boys and girls, turn from darkness to light, we already see signs of the kingdom.

The king is reigning in their lives. And as the gospel is preached, and that covenant is embraced, then we begin to see anticipations of this.

Now it's so important this is a covenant. It's not a contract. Now we all know about contracts, don't we? Contracts have millions of words, multitude of jargon, twisted, crooked language to cover every possible eventuality, because essentially people don't trust each other and people are sinful.

But this is not a contract. This is a marriage relationship. And that's the image that's used throughout Scripture. God is married to his people. Get it in the Old Testament, especially in that wonderful, passionate, moving book of Hosea, where God's passionate love for his people comes out.

And then in the New Testament, Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. And marriage is an image of that, an active parable on earth of the marriage of the Lamb.

[16:19] You see, contract is the language of religion. Covenant is the language of grace. Religion says, I do good, therefore God accepts me.

The Gospel says, God accepts me, therefore I do good. And there are light years of difference between these two views. Indeed, there is life and death. There is heaven and hell between these two views.

But the wonderful thing as well about this attractive covenant, it includes us, but it doesn't depend on us. One of the great problems that many of us have, particularly if we are involved in full-time Christian ministry, is that we think we are the Messiah and that the kingdom depends on us.

Now, there isn't a vacancy, so don't apply. The covenant, the kingdom, includes us, but it does not depend on us. It's grace.

Grace all the way. So there is the attractiveness of the covenant. Secondly, there is the challenge of the covenant in verses 6 and 7. Worthless men are like thorns that are thrown away.

[17:29] Same kind of imagery that we get in Psalm 1. The wicked, those who reject the covenant, are like chaff that the wind blows away. They're building their lives on something that's insubstantial.

Everything is empty without God. To reject the covenant is to prefer darkness to light. To reject the covenant is to prefer thirst to drinking water.

And in the light of eternity, all that is not of the covenant will be burned up. Remember, Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 3. So the covenant is attractive, but the covenant is challenging.

God chose David, and God has chosen you. God made a covenant with David, a unique covenant, but he's made a covenant with us through the Lord Jesus Christ. And now, thirdly, let's look at God's commendations in verses 8 to 39.

Now, don't read this chapter as a glorifying of war or a praise of sheer human effort. Although, some of these stories are wonderfully exciting and one would wish they'd been expanded a bit.

[18:47] An author like Nigel Trentor would have made a wonderful, a wonderful several chapters out of these exploits of the mighty, of the champions. But the key is verse 12.

Now, so Shammah takes his stand in the middle of the lentil plot and defended it and struck down the Philistines. And the Lord worked a great victory.

And the word translated victory is the word salvation. In other words, the work that Shammah did was part of God's work, part of God's saving purposes, part of the bringing salvation to Israel.

Another important point to remember in interpreting Old Testament, history, is that ancient Israel was a political state as well as the people of God and therefore had to defend itself, had to have the institutions of a state and therefore we mustn't simply, as it were, in the raw and without careful thought, simply transfer these kind of things as it's not glorifying of war.

But since ancient Israel was a political state needing defending, these great acts, these wonderful stories, and indeed all those guys whose names are mentioned, this is part of God's, covenant part of God's choice.

[20 : 07] And we are still looking to the future. You may well think, oh well, I can see how verses 1 to 7 look to the future. But surely here, we're looking to the past.

But we're not. This, this, after all, surely is the spirit summing up of these men. This is the verdict on these men and on the kind of people they were.

The final assessment, which of course for us still lies in the future. As William still said, the prize giving is upstairs. And we've got to remember that.

These, but no, the spirit is telling us these were the kind of men who surrounded David. There is a name that is conspicuous by its absence.

Well, at least he is mentioned, but he's only mentioned as the brother or the armor bearer of somebody. Verse 24, Esahel, the brother of Joab, and then 37, the armor bearer of Joab.

[21 : 11] Joab was David's commander-in-chief. Joab had been responsible for many daring exploits, not least the capture of the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites. Joab was a big noise in the world.

He's not a big noise in God's world. Joab, Joab, in the long run, turned out to be anti-covenant and anti-David. And Solomon had still to deal with him in the first years of his reign.

So, when we make provisional assessments, we've got to remember they may be set aside. This is God's role of honor. I want to mention one or two things. First of all, there is courage in the service of the kingdom.

As I said, these guys were fighting for the very survival of the nation. Now, these are probably taken from various stages in David's life because at one point when the three chiefs go and get the water for David, he's clearly in the cave of Adullam, which was the time he was being pursued by Saul before he actually became king.

In verse 8, Jocheb Bathshebeth, a Tachmanite, was chief of the three. One of the things about this chapter is it's difficult to know exactly what it means.

[22 : 33] Jocheb Bathshebeth probably is not his name but is a Hebrew phrase that means the one who sat in the seat, the one who was the leader.

But this is part of the ESV's policy of translation. When in doubt, make it into a proper name. That's what we've got here. But anyway, whatever his name was, he was a man of enormous courage and enormous daring.

And see, this fine little story here, similar to Eliezer and Shammah. But, of course, the most moving little story is the one in verses 13 to 17.

Which really shows us both the courage of these men and the loyalty that David inspired. David was then in the stronghold. The cave, or more exactly caves of Adullam, were a series of limestone caves frequented by outlaws and fugitives.

And at that time, David was there with his followers. He looks across the valley and he has a sudden longing for a drink of water from Bethlehem.

[23 : 39] Probably his early years rushing back to him, wondering if God's promise was ever going to be fulfilled. And think about what these guys did. It's easy enough to break through the camp of the Philistines, I suppose, if you're guys like these.

But think, you've got to come back. And you've got to come back carrying water. And you've got to do that once they're ready and up and aroused. But this is what they did. The sheer kindness and the sheer risk of it.

And it shows David's great, generous, chivalrous heart in verse 16. He poured it out to the Lord and said, Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this.

Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives? The tremendous loyalty to David. And David's own warm-hearted response. You can see how David inspired such loyalty.

Not only was he himself a formidable champion, but he was a human. He was a person with tremendous generosity of spirit. And then again, verse 20, Benaiah, he goes down, struck down a lion in a pit.

[24 : 49] That's verse 20. It's not all that difficult to go down into a pit, even if it's snowing. But it's awfully difficult to come back, especially if there is a lion there.

That's what Benaiah did. I have to quote from Ralph Davis, any pillock can go down into a snow-filled pit, but any pillock can't come up out again.

And so we have two sets of tracks going down into the pit, but only one set of tracks coming back again. You see, these men showed enormous courage in the service of the kingdom.

And they did it presumably without any particular recognition. They certainly weren't asked to do it. David didn't ask three champions to break through the Philistines. They were simply sensitive, knew what he wanted.

The second thing about this, God loves lists of names. Well, he does. Look at 1 Chronicles, chapter 1 to 9.

[25 : 51] I remember somebody telling me, that's what I like about the New Testament. It doesn't have long lists of names like the Old Testament. I said, have you ever read Matthew chapter 1? Matthew chapter, oh, but that's a bit about the birth of Jesus.

He said, yes, but before that. That's a long list of names. Romans 16, a long list of names of those in the Roman church whom Paul is delighting to honor.

What's this telling us? This is telling us that nothing done for the kingdom is ignored by God. These names, forgotten. These names, probably of men who now were no longer alive.

But they were important. Their work was part of the kingdom. Their work was something that God incorporated into his wider promises.

What did we sing a moment or two ago? My names from the palms of his hand, eternity will not erase. None of us have our names written in the Bible.

[26 : 58] But surely, more important is to have our names written in heaven. My names from the palms of his hand, eternity will not erase.

And here, these men, these unknown men are receiving well done, good and faithful servant. and there really is only one well done that matters.

Of course, being human, we love other well done, but there really ultimately is only one well done that will count. So you see, there's these stories of courage, these stories of daring, these stories which are so human and so realistic.

There's these lists of names that show us that God cares for us individually. But finally, this chapter is about sin and grace. I said most of these names were unknown, but look at the very last one at the very end of the chapter, verse 39.

Uriah, the Hittite. That name's certainly not unknown. That name brings back to Samuel 11 and 12, David's adultery, David's lying and cheating, David's murder by proxy.

[28 : 14] A reminder of how flawed David was. A reminder that David was not the Messiah. Look back at our own lives. There are names, there are situations which for us occupy the slot of Uriah, the Hittite.

And we realize just how weak we are, just how fickle we are. And as Willie was saying this morning, Uriah, the Hittite, is not something that we can simply set aside and say that was in the past.

We are weak, we are fickle. But surely there's more than that. Surely it is also a reminder of God's grace. The very fact that Uriah's name comes here, in this list of champions, along with the summing up of David's reign and how it pointed to the Messiah, surely shows us that in the overall purposes of God, where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.

And that seems to me to be the thing we need to remember about the mention of Uriah, the Hittite, and our Uriahs, that we have fallen, we are fallen, we are weak, we are fickle, and yet there is grace.

What Paul says, I persecuted the church of God. God. Now that's not the kind of equivalent of Uriah, the Hittite.

[29 : 43] John Newton, many of whose hymns we sing, on his tombstone quotes, as these words quoted as well, a great sinner saved by great grace.

So you see, it doesn't depend on us. We didn't choose ourselves, God chose us. We did not make the covenant, but we are allowed by grace to become part of it.

We are one day will receive the just and full and final assessment from the Lord. What does it depend on?

It surely depends on God our Father who chose us before the worlds were made. Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. It depends on his Son who sealed that covenant by his blood. that everlasting covenant sealed by his blood. And it depends on the Holy Spirit given to us to complete that work and to bring us to glory.

[30 : 48] And because of all that, like David, like Paul, like Abraham, we can rejoice in the God who when sin abounds makes grace to abound even more.

Amen. let's pray. And God our Father, you've been so gracious to us before the stars shone in the sky, before the worlds were made, you had predestined us to be conformed to the image of your Son.

And day by day in the messiness and in the fallenness and the sinfulness of our own lives, you continue to work out that covenant grace by the gracious Holy Spirit whom you have sent down to be the down payment and to bring us safely to glory.

And so we thank and praise you, the God of the covenant who sent your Son, who sealed that covenant with his blood and has sent his Spirit till the work on earth is done.

We praise you for this in Christ's name. Amen.