

High Expectations and Harsh Reality: Daring to Hope (Summer Bible Exposition 9)

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

And we pray that tonight you would help us understand it and understand your purposes in your world and understand your purposes for us. Father, we pray that this passage might shed light on those issues. And we pray that you would help us to respond in obedience. And Father, we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, in these last four weeks, we have covered an awful lot of ground. I mean, we have we've gone through a lot. And I wish that we had more opportunity, particularly to look at these last 10 or so chapters of 2 Samuel.

But we just simply don't have time to do that. These these last chapters we are going to look at. So chapters 21 through to 24 are, I think, a theological reflection upon the book as a whole.

In fact, these chapters, I think, represent a sort of summary of the whole of the books. You theologially set the groundwork in chapters one and two. And in chapters 21 to 24, you sum it up.

[1 : 32] But before we look at these chapters in overview, which is all we're going to have time for tonight, I want you to travel back in history with me, engage in some time travel. I want you to, you know, tighten your seatbelts, as it were. Travel back in time.

I want you to notice the scenery as we move back in history. First, we look at David's return to Jerusalem in chapter 19. Then we look back to the death of his son, Absalom, who had deposed David from the throne.

Then we look back to Absalom's killing of his brother Amnon. Then we look at Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar. Then we look at David's murder of Uriah.

And then we look at David sleeping with Bathsheba. Then we look at God's covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7. Then we go back even further and we see the installation of the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem.

And then we see David's capture of Jerusalem after he's made king. Then we see the death of Saul. Then the guerrilla existence that David had lived during the time of Saul.

[2 : 39] Then we see Saul the king himself. And finally, our destination, 1 Samuel chapter 8. And as we get out and look around in the scenery in 1 Samuel chapter 8, which we were at four weeks ago, it's very different to what we've become used to these last few weeks. For there's no David. There's no Saul. In fact, there are no kings over Israel.

Kingship in 1 Samuel 8 is an unknown in Israel. Israel had been ruled directly by God. And through the Spirit, God had raised up people called judges who were to rule over his people.

And then in chapter 8 of 1 Samuel, the last of those judges, a man called Samuel is old. And the surrounding nations are growing more and more powerful and they're pressing in upon Israel.

And the stability of Israel is under significant threat. And there's no candidate who looks as though he can take over from Samuel the judge. And they don't have another possible leader. So they look around. They wonder what they're going to do. And they look for alternatives.

And they want an alternative that's a bit more lasting. They want a king. A king who would bind them together. A king who would supply what they needed.

[3 : 54] A king who would be a sort of potent leader, a potent weapon against the foreign threat. Kingship, though, is a dangerous thing. Samuel knew that. God knew that.

And God had warned them of this very thing back in Deuteronomy 17. So that's where we're going to start. So if you turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 17, verses 14 to 20.

This is perhaps the most significant passage on kingship in the Old Testament. It is God laying down what kingship should be like before kingship arrives.

So Deuteronomy 17. And I'm going to read from verse 14 all the way through to verse 20. So follow with me, please. And when you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me.

You may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you. You are not permitted to put a foreigner over you who is not one of your own community.

[5 : 04] Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself and return the people to Egypt in order to require more horses, since the Lord has said to you, you must never return that way again.

And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away, so that also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantities for himself.

And when he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written in the presence of the Levitical priests, and it shall remain with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he might learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community, nor turning aside from the commandment either to the right or to the left, so that he and all his descendants may reign as king of his kingdom in Israel.

Now, 1 Samuel chapter 8 is even more explicit. So have a look at verses 10 to 17 with me. So turn now to 1 Samuel chapter 8, verses 10 to 17, and we'll read that, and I want you to listen with Deuteronomy 17 in mind.

1 Samuel chapter 8. And I'm reading from verse 10. 1 Samuel chapter 9.

[6 : 50] 1 Samuel chapter 9.

Despite those warnings, Deuteronomy 17, 1 Samuel 8. The Israelites press on in their bid to replace God as their king, and God buckles into their request.

He allows them to take on kingship. He even takes it into account in his purposes for his future. He incorporates kingship into a covenant with his people. And that's spelled out in 2 Samuel 7, which we looked at a couple of weeks ago.

And in 2 Samuel 7, God reiterates his promises to Abraham. And he promises that the promises given to Abraham will be fulfilled through David and his descendants. In other words, through this king.

In other words, through this king. He will make David's name great. He will provide a place for the people of God. He will give them rest from their enemies. Moreover, God will raise up an offspring for David, whose throne and whose kingdom will be established forever.

[8 : 16] And God will be a father to that king. And he shall be God's son. That is the promise made to David and all the people of God in 2 Samuel 7.

If that is the promise, then let me tell you about reality. For reality is very different. Chapters 8 through to chapter 20 and the whole of the books of Samuel can bring us from promise to reality.

And it is true that God does make David's name great among the nations. It is true that God does establish a place for his people that fulfills the promises made to Abraham.

It is true that God does eventually give them peace from their enemies. These chapters make this abundantly clear. But these chapters make another point abundantly clear.

And the point they make is that David's kingship is far from ideal. David the king, this first king, this in many ways ideal king, rules in what is far from being a godlike fashion.

[9 : 26] On the contrary, from chapters 8 through to 20, you deliberately pile example upon example upon example of how David fails.

This is the man who tricks a priest of God into believing that he is on an urgent royal business. This is way back in 1 Samuel 1. So that that priest can provide him with consecrated bread and a sword. This piece of deception costs the lives of 85 priests and their families. This David is the man whose military campaigns include some barbarities of the highest order. This is the man who sleeps with the wife of one of his most loyal soldiers and then murders him so he won't be found out.

This is a man who we find out in 2 Samuel is a singularly bad father. An unforgiving tyrant. In David, the David we meet in 2 Samuel is a flawed human being.

And the point is clear. God has an ideal revealed in his promise. Reality is very far from that ideal.

[10:32] And if we're really honest, we wouldn't be surprised, would we? The rest of the Bible would have led us to expect exactly that. You see, Genesis 1-3 tells us what human beings are like.

And what does it tell us? They live as independent beings. That is why you start with Genesis 1-3 so you might know what humans are like. So that when you come to 2 Samuel, you've got no surprises.

Humans are unable to meet the standards God sets. They fail in the face of God's expectations. And David is human.

Please understand, he may be right at times, but he is human. He is frail, sinful and unable of himself to meet God's expectations. And friends, if that is true of David, there's a massive question hanging over our heads, isn't there?

And it is, where do we go from here? Why is God's purpose never reached? How do we bridge this gap between God's promise and cold, hard reality?

[11:46] And let me tell you that 2 Samuel 21-24 attempts to do this. And it attempts to do this by giving us a theological explanation of the whole book.

So let's have a look at it together. Now, you might see at the back of that little outline that I've given you, there's a little outline of how I think these passages are structured. I want you to notice from that little outline that there are three pairs of stories in four chapters.

These chapters, I think, are not just sort of appendices tucked on the end of the books of Samuel, because, you know, they had some material I didn't know what to do with. Notice the first and the last passages here treat the same theme.

They look at one side of kingship. They use some examples from the life of Saul and David to show just what real kings are like. Real kings act with their own interests in mind.

Real kings act with their own political futures in mind. Real kings have their own agendas. These agendas are often cruel and they have unjust results.

[12:55] These agendas often bring down the just judgment of God upon the whole people of God. You can see that in 2 Samuel 24, because David takes a census. Why would he be wanting to take a census of the people of God, despite God's command that he should not?

Why would you be wanting to take a census? Why? So you could tax people. And so you could work out how many men you could have in your armies and not trust God.

That's why it's regarded as being a sin that David commits. Then you have Saul in chapter 21, verses 1 to 14.

We're told how Saul the king does certain things that were really in his own political interest. If you have a look at 2 Samuel 21, verse 1, you can see this. So turn with me to 2 Samuel 21, verse 1. It says this. There was a famine in the days of David for three years. And year after year, David inquired of the Lord.

[13:55] And the Lord said, there is blood guilt on Saul and on his house because he put the Gibeonites to death. Now, the Gibeonites had centuries of a non-aggression treaty that had been established from the books of Joshua on with Israel.

Verse 2 tells us that Saul had been very zealous for Israel and Judah. And it appears as though he wanted to get rid of this troublesome group of people that long ago Israel had made a covenant with.

And so he engaged in an attempt at genocide. And in doing so, he brought down the judgment of God. And that judgment now needs to be atoned for. And that atonement will cost even more lives as David seeks to make up for it.

Now, friends, that is the reality of kingship. Kings do their own thing, their own way without God. Kings can be tyrants. No matter how good your motivation might be as a ruler, there is almost never the absence of self-interest.

And it will come out sooner or later. King David, as I said, does much the same. He takes a census and he does that in order to work out, you know, whether he's got enough for an army and how he can tax people.

[15:12] And as a result, atonement needs to be made for that as well. That's the reality of kingship. And that atonement will cost. It costs the people of God. This is the reality of kingship.

Kings do their own thing, their own way without God. Kings can be tyrants. Now, of course, there's the other side of the story in 1 and 2 Samuel.

Kings can also be wonderfully successful warriors. Kings can do what Israel really wanted. What did they want? A king to lead us. Why? So that we could be shielded from our enemies.

We could engage our enemies in battle. We could be victorious over them. You see, kings do do what Israel wanted of a king. They defeat the enemies of Israel and they win great battles.

For example, have a look at the passage in chapter 21, verses 15 to 22 and chapter 23, 8 to 39. But do you know how kings manage to do this? Well, they do what God warned them in 1 Samuel 8.

[16:13] They take from the sons of the people of Israel. And they employ foreign mercenaries. If you look at the list of David's warriors, you will find foreign mercenaries within them.

These are the realities of kingship. Self-seeking, less than ideal kings, but kings who do what you want. That is, win battles. Kings whose battles are won, though, at a cost.

That is the reality of kingship. This is life as it is. And then bang in the middle. So we have now worked from the outside into the next step in. And now we are going to look at the two middle passages which are poems.

And when we come to it, I don't know about you, but as you had that passage read to you earlier on, there is a sense in which we can't believe it. Did you notice that? The David we meet in 2 Samuel chapter 22 is not the David we have just heard about for the last 10 chapters.

There is nothing of the flawed character that was the David who ruled Israel in the early 10th century BC. He is blameless in the execution of his kingly duties, apparently. Have a look at chapter 22, verses 21 to 24, which I deliberately had read to you.

[17:23] Listen to it. And as you do, I want you to have Bathsheba in the back of your mind. The incident with Bathsheba. Just have it sitting there in the back of your mind. And let me read these verses to you.

The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness. Hang on. According to the cleanliness of my hands, he has recompensed me.

For I have kept the ways of the Lord and not wickedly departed from my God. I thought in Deuteronomy there's a command about not committing adultery myself.

For all his ordinances, including that one, I presume, and murder and all of that and theft. All his ordinances were before me and from his statutes I did not turn aside.

I was blameless before him and I kept myself from guilt. Now you cannot read that having read the previous 10 chapters without saying, where has this person been for the last 10 chapters?

[18:28] Listen to chapter 23, verses 3 to 5. The God of Israel has spoken. Friends, can you see what is going on in these passages?

Can you hear the anomaly here? These passages are not about the daily life of David. 2 Samuel chapters 9 to 20 and chapters 21 and chapter 24 have told us that this is not the David that we meet in history.

And in case you don't believe it, he's going to remind you about it in chapter 24 when David takes a census. These passages, these poems in the middle represent the hope of David and the hope of Israel.

And what is their hope? It is for a righteous king who will always and consistently do what David did.

Friends, can you hear this? These two passages, the promise and the ideal to which Israel will all look, this is life as it should be.

[19:57] The contrast is really, really profound when you look at it. One of the passages, two of the sets of passages set out reality for us. This is life as it is in the kingdom of Israel under David and Saul.

And here is this other set of passages in the middle, setting out the promises, setting out life as it should be. And we find ourselves asking this question. Will promise ever match reality?

And the message of chapters 22 and 23 say, yes, they will. Their answer is a clear, resounding yes.

For the promises you see do not rest on human performance. The passages are clear. Those two passages, those two poems make it clear. It is only God who can make David like this.

It rests on a God who will act. And that runs all the way through the psalm of chapter 22. And it climaxes in verse 51 of chapter 22. Have a look at it there. He is a tower of salvation for his king.

[21:06] And showers steadfast love on his anointed to David and his descendants forever. The same thing is said in verse 5 that we read of chapter 23. Can you see what the passages are saying?

In the end, David is not reliant on his own goodness for his status before God. He depends on God who will act in grace to reinstate the one to whom the promises are made.

And this and this alone helps us out. You see, friends, please hear me tonight. This is the guts of the promises of God. The reality of God.

The reality of grace. The reality of God's intervention in his world. And this alone imparts life and meaning and future to the promises and the ideal painted, despite the reality.

This is what these passages are saying. They are saying, God is here. God is sovereign. You can have hope in him, even if you cannot trust a David.

[22 : 11] He will bring about the promises he has made to David and all Israel and all humanity. And he will do it despite David, despite human frailty, despite David's sin.

And 3,000 years later, we know that he did. For he fulfilled the promises in a righteous king, Jesus. In Jesus, the son of David. Jesus, the son of God. Jesus, the true shepherd of Israel. Jesus fulfills the promises to David and his descendants.

And he can sing this song in chapter 22 and 23 without a hiccup. And without us ever saying, not him. That's not about him.

Jesus fulfills all the promises of God. He is God's yes and God's amen to all the promises of God.

Now, what I want to do now to show how this impacts on us, because I want to show you it's not just a distant truth that sits in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel.

[23 : 14] I want to show you that this is something that you can cling to every day of your life. What I want to do now is to let you into my mind and my feelings a little. And I'm going to do that because I presume that you're like me.

That the things that go on inside me, in my life, go on in yours as well. The point is that I often feel the same tension that the writer of the books of Samuel felt.

You see, I often look at the promises of God and then back the reality of my life. And I say to myself, Andrew, what hope have you got?

Let me explain. And I want to explain just by looking first at the promises that God makes to us as Christians. That is the ideals that he puts in his word for us. In other words, I want to look at life as it should be.

Then I want to look at life as it is. So here's life as it should be. Now, I'm going to be selective in this, but here are some of the promises, some of the ideals set out for the people of God in the New Testament.

[24 : 19] All the language and expression is drawn from the New Testament. The true godly person in the New Testament is like this. They always have the best interests of others in mind. They love others as they love themselves.

They have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, envy, greed, drunkenness and the like.

They are characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. They don't let any unwholesome word come out of their mouths, but only those things that are helpful for building others up according to their needs.

They rid themselves of bitterness, of rage, of anger, of brawling, of slander, along with every form of malice. Instead, they are kind and compassionate to each other, forgiving each other, just as they have been forgiven in Christ.

They treat each other with respect and as equals in Christ. They don't rule it over others for their own good. As children, they obey their parents. Their minds dwell on those things that are noble, true, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

[25 : 33] They are keen to learn from God and practice what they learn. They have thrown aside all sinful habits and practice righteousness. They don't let sin reign in their bodies, nor do they obey its sinful desires.

They offer themselves rather to God and use the parts of their body righteously. And they live in prayerful dependence upon God, always faithful and always obedient. Friends, let me tell you about reality.

In the real world in which I live, things are not that easy, are they? You see, I personally, and I'll speak about me because I can't speak about you, I'm only too aware of that list of things.

I know my Bible well. I know what it says. And I'm only so, I'm just keenly aware of that ideal. And yet, when I'm truthful with myself, I'm just like David.

I don't live up to God's expectations. I don't always have the best interests of others in mind. I don't often, I don't look out for others as I look after myself. Although I don't have difficulties with all the lusts of the flesh from Galatians 5, I do have problems with some of them.

[26 : 43] And the fruit of the Spirit are not always the things that characterize my relationship with God. And the words that issue from my mouth are certainly not always gracious, seasoned, as it were, with salt.

I have spoken words within my family and outside of my family that have destroyed rather than built up. I've got angry with my wife and my children, with staff or students at college.

Forgiveness and compassion are not always as high on my agenda as I would like it to be. Friends, don't mistake me. I do have moments when I do all those things. But in my own estimation, they're not nearly as often as I would like them to be.

I'm not as consistent as I would like to be. I know the ideal and I really, really, really want to be like that ideal. I desire to be like it with all my heart.

I pray that I would be like it. But more often than not, sin dominates me and seems to overtake me. And it still seems to exercise more rule over me than the ideal would indicate that it should.

[27 : 52] And yes, I expect that daily I'm growing and changing. But for me too, the reality does not meet the ideal. I'm just like every other human being that's preceded me, except for one.

I'm just like David. And caught in this bind that he is caught in. And I cry out to God, What can I do? What hope have I got? Perhaps you've experienced this as I have. Can reality ever meet the ideal? Can life ever be as it should be? Can I ever be as I should be?

Can I ever be rescued from the bind that I find myself in? Will sin, failure and human frailty always be my master? And do you know what? It's here that the words of 2 Samuel speak to me and they say, Andrew, yes.

Yes. If you leave David, as David the man without God, that is if you leave God out of the picture, then every hope for you, Andrew, is gone.

[28 : 59] David will be left carving out his little kingdom, left murdering innocent men, and the same goes for you, Andrew. If you leave yourself as the human being, if you leave God out of the picture and out of your existence, if you do not take him into account, then you don't stand a chance.

You'll be left in your sin. But 2 Samuel doesn't leave us there, does it? It is so glorious. It reminds us there is a God who is sovereign. There is a God who is active.

There is a God who intervenes on behalf of his chosen king. There is a God who intervenes on behalf of his people, and his intervention is the guarantee that God's promises will not be overtaken by my human frailty.

God's grace is the promise that the ideal will survive, that life as it should be will triumph over life as it is.

Why? Because he's a sovereign God who, as David said here, is almighty to save. He is God.

[30 : 09] But there's still a question left, isn't there? Is it waiting in your minds? The question is, how do I know, Andrew? What assurance can you give me that these things are true?

How do I know that God will intervene? How do I know? Well, as inheritors of the New Testament, we know for certain, don't we?

For God has already acted. He's already intervened. He's fulfilled the promises given to David here in 2 Samuel. He's fulfilled all other, so many of the other promises of the Old Testament, and he's the guarantee that God will continue to act in his world, that God will continue to intervene on behalf of his people.

And in effect, in Jesus, God is saying this, don't be daunted, Andrew, and all of us, by reality. Don't be afraid. You can trust the promises of God.

You can trust them. In Jesus, all the promises of God have their yes, and their amen. Friends, do you believe in Jesus? Well, he is God's ringing yes.

[31 : 22] He is a resounding, clanging, earth-shattering amen to all the promises of God. He is God's ironclad guarantee that he can be trusted to fulfill his promises.

The ideal will be met. He is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure. That is his word. Jesus is the guarantee that life as it should be will overtake life as it is.

You will be saved. You can be right with God. Righteousness will flourish in this earth. Wisdom will be given to you.

The meek shall inherit the earth. God will wipe all tears away from eyes. Swords will be beaten into plowshares.

The lamb will lie down with the lion. God shall rule the nations with an iron rod. And he shall punish the wicked. And Christ will come again.

[32 : 30] And you shall be changed. And you'll be made like him. And God, if you are in Christ, will transform your lowly body to be like his glorious body.

Like the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of these promises are made by God. And many more on top of them. And God assures us that his intervention in the world in Jesus Christ is the guarantee that God's promises will not be overtaken by human frailty.

Not mine. Not yours. Not anyone's. He tells us Jesus is our hope. He takes all these promises and more.

And he says to us in Jesus, they are yes, yes, and yes. As 2 Corinthians 1.20 says, no matter how many are the promises of God, they are yes in Christ.

And so through him, the Amen is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both you, both us and you stand firm in Christ.

[33 : 42] It is God who does it. Let's pray. Father, when we see, well, when we read the pages of Genesis 2 and 3, we see sinful people like ourselves.

We have, as we've looked at 1 and 2 Samuel over these last few weeks, seen people like ourselves. And we cry out to you and wonder, can things be different?

Father, we pray that you would fix our eyes upon the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises that you have made have their yes and their Amen. And Father, with our eyes fixed on him, please help us to march into this week and this year and into the rest of life, knowing that your promises will all be fulfilled in him and that you'll make us like him and that you'll eventually join us who have confessed our faith and put our trust in him to be with him and with you.

We thank you for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And whatever. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 18] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Listen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.