

2 Samuel 23:1-7

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

It astounds you to hear it. The shock and surprise is evident on all of your faces at this very moment. But it's true. Sometimes they lie to you. Now, we are even now in the middle of an election cycle.

And I would wager if you pay close attention and keep both your eyes open and both of your ears open, you might catch a lie like this. You might catch one or two half-truths.

A few exaggerations of fact. A few hyperbolic detours. Detours. A few taking of liberties. I know it surprises some of you.

[1 : 40] But for those of you who are not surprised by this, perhaps there are a few of you who came into church tonight knowing this particular secret already. Perhaps the greater surprise would be to hear that there may be a ruler who tells the truth.

Perhaps you listen to the news every night. Perhaps on your way home or once at home. You listen to the news with your defenses held high. With thoroughgoing suspicion about all the words that come out of politicians' mouths.

Now, if this more accurately describes you, then I suspect our text and this sermon tonight may actually surprise you. For this sermon is about a ruler who comes and causes to make, he causes his people to flourish.

A ruler who rules in justice and righteousness. A ruler who keeps every promise he makes. If you were to find such a ruler, would you vote for him?

Would you even campaign for him? Would you put a bumper sticker on your car about him? Would you put a lawn sign out about him? What precisely would you do if you found a ruler who never lied to you?

[3 : 02] Tonight, I want to speak with you about a ruler who keeps every promise he ever made. You won't find the stories about him in the newspaper. Instead, we have to go to a different text.

The text we're going to look at to discover this ruler is 2 Samuel 23, verses 1 through 7. You can turn there with me.

We'll be there the whole evening. 2 Samuel 23, 1 through 7. And my hope tonight is that as we read this text together, we'll see one major point.

This is the one point. God's children celebrate when God's king is crowned. God's children celebrate when God's king is crowned.

God's king is crowned. Let's look at the text. 2 Samuel 23, verses 1 through 7. Now, these are the last words of David.

[4 : 02] The oracle of David. The son of Jesse. The oracle of the man who was raised on high. The anointed of the God of Jacob.

The sweet psalmist of Israel. The spirit of the Lord speaks by me. His word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken.

The rock of Israel has said to me, 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.

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 he will not cause, will he not cause to prosper all of my help and my desire? But worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away.

[5 : 17] For they cannot be taken with the hand, but the man who touches them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they are utterly consumed with fire.

Now in order to understand this text before us this evening, a bit of context might be useful. This text tells us that these are the last words of David, which is a strange designation because after these last words of David, David keeps on talking.

He's got plenty more to say after this. You could read this as a simple error by the narrator, but even if a cursory proofreading shows us that this is not the case, these are not in fact the last words of David, perhaps something else is intended.

And I suggest that's exactly what is intended. These are not chronologically the last words of David. These are rather the culminating words of David. These words are supposed to describe in a capsule form the entirety of David's reign.

They epitomize his rule. These words are presented to us as an oracle, which is a rare thing for David.

[6 : 40] An oracle or a prophetic utterance that David makes under the influence of the Spirit of God. Do you see that there? A long introduction. The oracle of David. The oracle of the man who was raised on high.

And then in the second verse, the Spirit of the Lord speaks by me. These are not only David's words. These are God's words. David is looking back as a historian over his rule.

But the Spirit might be saying something prophetic as well as historical. We'll come back to that toward the end. So there's a little context for what's going on here.

The centerpiece of this passage is verses 3 and 4, where we find the reason that God's children rejoice when God's king is crowned.

And that's where I want to spend most of our time this evening tonight, looking at 3 and 4. Look at these verses again. The God of Israel has spoken. The rock of Israel has said to me, 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.

[8 : 06] These words David speaks about himself. He is the Lord's anointed one in this passage. He is the one who deals justly with his people. Why? First off, because he fears God.

He knows himself to be one who is himself under authority. And therefore, he is supposed to rule over those over whom he has authority with justice.

And look at the metaphors that are used here for the reign of this king. He dawns on them like the morning light, the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

These are metaphors of flourishing as in a garden, the things that are required to make the plants that this king is husbanding flourish, the unmitigated, unclouded sun, the mist of rain that waters this garden.

This is a king who serves his people, who rules on behalf of his people. That's how you tell a good king, that he rules on behalf of the people over whom he has authority.

[9 : 22] He does not use the people over whom he has authority for his own purposes. He causes them to flourish. This flourishing metaphor, this garden metaphor, I don't think is accidental.

Do you remember what man and woman's first task was? To go and have dominion, caring, husbanding of a garden.

To bring forth the fruits of the earth. To cooperate with God in making the world flourish. To be his agents in the world, causing goodness and justice and beauty and love to reign over all the earth.

This is what we were meant for. This was our first task. And the good king has not forgotten that. The good king remembers that he, as a descendant of Adam, is charged with the task of being God's agent in the world.

Of causing the world to bring forth much fruit. To beautify the world. To cause it to abound with goodness. This is why God's children celebrate when God's king is crowned.

[10 : 49] Because God's king is one who knows that he is charged with bringing the earth to flourishing. And the people over whom he rules rejoice when they see the world righted from its wrongs, beautified from its ugliness, encompassed in love rather than wrapped in violence.

How could God's children not celebrate that sort of thing? Now, you may be skeptical about this claim that freedom and flourishing come from submission to good authorities, rulers.

I'm even using the word kings over and over. Those of us in the audience who are Americans, we are taught from our youth that kings are bad things and we're supposed to revolt against them. And here I am preaching to you about the goodness of a king, that we should indeed even celebrate when certain kings are around.

Isn't that treasonous to my American citizenship? Well, I don't think so. I do think the American ethos does not train us well to sympathize with this idea.

We think that freedom and flourishing mean doing what is right in our own eyes. But the Bible has something to say about this.

[12:08] Even this story, when we remember where this story is in the overall narrative of the Bible, we have reason to doubt our American idea that freedom and flourishing are doing whatever is right in our own eyes.

Do you remember where this story begins? Even back before the king, in the book of Judges. Judges is one of those really depressing books over and over.

They come into the land and it's racked in evil and a judge comes up and takes care of business. The judge dies and the text says there was no judge in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes.

We think this is a utopia. The Bible clearly depicts it as anarchy, violence. The poor and the weak are not taken care of when everyone does what he wants.

Something is needed to solve the problem of human violence. And anarchy is not the answer. And that's where 1 and 2 Samuel come in.

[13:18] The people want a king. And God says, okay, you need a ruler. I want it to be your king. But if the people yearn so much for a king, Samuel, give them one.

And at first, it seemed like it was going to work. Saul, this stalwart man who inspired hope and strength into his people, flourished for a while.

And then he fell away. And David came. David, the good king, the man after God's own heart. Surely, he is the answer to the problems of the wickedness of his people. Except when you read the stories of David, it seems like he is wracked by the same wickedness of his people.

We know the Bible, the narrative, the long arc of the Bible has said that somehow the answer to our problems is a king, but not Saul and not David. So who?

[14:33] At the beginning of 1 Samuel, the passage that brackets these ending songs in 2 Samuel, you see the woman named Hannah, a barren and lonely woman who pleads with God for deliverance for a child.

And when God provides a child, she sings a song, a song of prophecy. And she says this, She sees the Lord is going to do something through one whom she calls the anointed.

And here in this text, we see David takes this on for himself. Look there in verse 5, Does not my house stand so with God? David sees this as applying to himself.

This is why he sings this song toward the end of his life. David is a historian chronicling his own reign. What's the grounds for him saying that this applies to his kingship?

Verse 5 again, He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. What's David's reason for saying this?

[16:06] What's the proof that God has made a covenant with him? Well, first off, God has spoken to him. Second and thirdly, David, over the course of the last several chapters, has destroyed the enemies of God.

Something that today looks to us like a needless, senseless bloodbath. But here's what he's done, little by little. He has cleared out a space of peace for his son to construct the temple.

Solomon will not need to marshal grand armies to defeat any more Philistines. David's already done that. Solomon can muster the strength of Israel to build the dwelling place of God.

This is one of David's greatest feats. things. But, if we read this passage only as history, then it certainly must be pure mockery.

For we've already seen the dreadful things that David has done. And this next chapter, after this one, will be no different. The list of his mighty men, those come next. The mighty men that did all these things, that won all these battles with David.

[17:17] Do you know who that last name in that list is? Uriah the Hittite. The narrator mentions last Uriah the Hittite, ensuring that no matter who else the listener remembers, what other names in this long list of names the listener remembers, he will remember Uriah the Hittite.

What's so special about Uriah the Hittite? Well, this one of David's mighty men had the prestige of being killed by his king, of having his wife stolen by his king. David is guilty of the blood of Uriah the Hittite, and the narrator won't let us forget it.

He puts his name right at the end of the list. And right after that, David will take a census, which shows his desire to trust in his own military strength rather than God, and God is angry about this and causes a pestilence to come and kill 70,000 of David's men.

David is the one who rules in perfect uprightness. The narrator does not want us to read it so simply. When these two contradictory pieces, apparently contradictory pieces of information are presented to us side by side, the narrator wants us to think.

On the one hand, the just one rules over men. This is David ruling in the fear of God, causing the people to flourish. On the other hand, he's imperfect at best.

[18:48] What the narrator, I think, wants us to see is this. That David in this passage is pointing beyond himself. Indeed, all of Samuel is pointing beyond itself.

It ends and culminates with David, but it ends with David's failures as well as his successes. The Bible has told us that a king is necessary to restrain human wickedness and to cause the earth to flourish.

But David's not a great, a perfect candidate for this. Do you remember what I said here? That David speaks not only as a historian, but in the Holy Spirit, speaks also as a prophet.

David is looking forward to another king that is to come that rules in justice and righteousness.

Look here in verse 5 again. David says, God has made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.

[19:57] more. Historically, we know that a united kingdom only lasted for about one more generation after David and the whole thing went to pot. How can this be said to be an everlasting covenant?

Christians know the answer to this. The answer is that David was always supposed to point to somebody, the better David, the true king, who would truly cause justice to reign on the earth, who would restore the garden that once was lost, that would cause the earth and all the people in his care to flourish.

And this king came in riding on a donkey, was crowned not in gold but in thorns, was lifted up not on a throne but on a cross, and did not live over his people but died for his people.

How can this one be a king? Jesus can be a king because he did not stay dead. And after his death, he rose again, and after his resurrection, he ascended.

He ascended not simply like a divine elevator bumping up into the basement of heaven. No, he ascended like a king ascends to a throne. And all the way back here in Samuel, hundreds and hundreds of years earlier, we have it foretold that a true king would come, God's chosen king would be crowned, and God's cherished children would celebrate.

[21:41] So when we read this, we ought not think only of it as the history of David's reign, but also as the prophecy of the coming king, the one who is the desire of all nations, the joy of every longing heart.

what is in this text for us? What does this mean for us, who no longer search for kings, but nevertheless find ourselves to be in an election cycle?

I think this text tells us a few things. First, for those who are in authority. Notice the way a just ruler exercises authority. authority, they exercise authority in such a way as to cause the earth to flourish. Again, these garden metaphors, restoring Eden, bringing the fullness of earth, the fullness of God's creation to blossoming. those of you who exercise authority in ways big or small, either in elected office or even in a parent, being a parent, or even in an office, do you have anybody in your life whom you serve over whom you have authority?

If you do, you have the opportunity to work with God to cause the earth to flourish, to make it, like David for Solomon, easier for your children and those who come after you to worship God.

[23:19] That's a choice you have. Or, you can be like those in verse 6 and 7. Worthless men are like thorns that are thrown away.

Do you remember what Adam's curse was in the garden? That his work would be marked by thistles and thorns. that now Eden would be overcome with these thorns.

And here David speaks of worthless men as these thorns. The very thorns that the one who is to shepherd and husband the garden needs to cut down with iron and steel and throw into the fire.

For those of us who exercise authority, this is our choice. To work with God in causing the earth to flourish or to be one of those thorns that needs to be pulled up and thrown into the fire. Use your authority, therefore, to cause the earth to flourish. To cause your children and your coworkers and your family and all those around you, over whom you have authority or not, to flourish.

[24 : 34] set an example in your life of justice and mercy and love. Ruling like this king in the fear of God.

Is your life lived in the tangible fear of God, knowing that you will give an account one day to this king Jesus who now sits enthroned over heaven and earth?

This choice is yours and David would beg you, exercise your authority in the fear of God, causing those around you to flourish. Pray for the people that surround you.

Be a good example for them. Encourage them and strengthen them. What about those of us who don't have authority or who are under authority?

None of us is president in this room and that means we are all at least under one authority. What should we do? What does this text teach us about how we are to behave under authority?

[25 : 38] The first thing it tells us is this. Do not be cynical. Do not be cynical about your leaders. A cynic is one who has given over to despair, who has thought our leaders are so corrupt that there is nothing for which to rejoice any longer.

I will never get my hopes up. I won't be fooled again. men. But this passage talks about just rulers who bring flourishing to their people and worthless men who grow up like weeds and are fit only to be cut down and burned.

This text thinks there is a real difference between these people. We should pray that God might send good rulers so that the lands in which we dwell might flourish like a garden, not wither like a desert.

desert. We ought to pray to God that we have occasion to celebrate the crowning of one whom God has chosen to lead us. We cannot be despairing.

The Christian is commanded to hope. Hope for what? Not that this world will be somehow transformed into heaven little by little. No. We cannot be given over to despair.

[26 : 56] So this text teaches us that we ought not despair. It also teaches us that we ought not follow false messiahs. Humans are hard wired to seek for messiahs.

That's why we believe high-flying rhetoric every four years. But that rhetoric and those messiahs will always disappoint us.

messiahs. Those messiahs share our sins. They participate in our flaws. You know, the only way to ensure that you will never be disappointed by your rulers is to plan to be disappointed by your rulers.

The only way never to be disappointed by your rulers is to plan to be disappointed by your rulers. They won't let you down if you plan on them letting you down. don't make them into messiahs.

We incline toward one of these directions, either being messianic about our favorite person, our favorite elected official, or being cynical. They're all the same. Crooks, thieves, bums, throw them out.

[28 : 09] We're tempted to think this way about all of those in authority over us. Our bosses, probably even more proximate to us than the president, are the particular objects of our scorn.

Don't mess, don't make a messiah out of anybody above you. Don't be cynical claiming that there is no real justice in this world.

Instead, pray for your leaders. Pray for your leaders. Pray that God would give us the occasion to celebrate the rule of justice.

God would send ones to us who would come to us like the morning light, like sun shining forth on a cloudless morning and rain that makes the earth bring forth grass.

Be thankful for the small ways we see that now. Christians are taught to expect very little from the rulers of this world. God. We are also taught to thank the Lord for every shred of grace that we see.

[29 : 21] And for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, there are millions of shreds of grace for which to be thankful. Do you thank the Lord when you come to a red light, which has prevented you from smashing into another car, coming in the opposite direction?

There's a sign of good governance. Do you praise the Lord with eager rejoicing when in the middle of the night, in a thunderstorm, you are awoken by the scraping of a snowplow out on the street,

doing a job to make sure you can get to work the next day?

This is a little shred of grace. Good governance is happening. When the mail arrives at your home, assuming it doesn't include only bills, we should rejoice.

Something has gone right in the world. Today I was not falsely imprisoned. There are plenty of countries in which that's not the case. We ought to rejoice and be thankful for every shred of grace we see.

In a world that is given over to cynicism, what kind of people would we be if we were pervasively thankful for all of the shreds of grace that we see?

[30 : 37] we can in fact in this world get dim visions of what it would look like for the dawn to come on us like a morning light and for the sun to rise on cloudless mornings and the waters to water the earth bringing forth grass.

We can see these things. When we see them we ought to rejoice. hope for the coming king. The king that David himself looked forward to. Because this king is coming. this king has said behold I am coming quickly.

With a real crown on his head this time. And a real white horse upon which he is riding. This king is coming. The flourishing garden of Eden that our parents forsook will one day flourish again. And those who love Christ can live there. There in this garden in the middle of the city of the new Jerusalem where God himself sits enthroned.

[31 : 56] This is the king that our hearts yearn for every election cycle. Every campaign promise we hear that we allow ourselves to believe even slightly is a picture of our yearning for this good king.

The failures and the successes of this world's leaders are both designed to point our minds to the coming of God's true anointed one.

The successes of these leaders because they're only a dim picture of what full flourishing will look like when Christ is finally enthroned and subdues all of his enemies.

And the failures of this world's leaders ought to cause us to raise our eyes higher up to that divine king as well knowing that he will never let us down.

None who trusted in the Lord were ever put to shame. This Messiah does not disappoint. This is the ruler who keeps every campaign promise he's ever made.

[33 : 06] This is the Messiah our hearts truly yearn for. And this Messiah is coming. And when this chosen king of God comes, God's children will celebrate at his coronation.

How will we celebrate? Well we are told in the Bible that not only will this king come and rid the world of his enemies, but he will also wed himself to his bride.

This is a king betrothed to a bride. And we who are in his church are that bride. The celebration that will be ours when this king comes is a bridal feast.

It's a wedding supper. It's a meal. With bread and wine there for the taking and union with our king. What a celebration that will be. And that celebration is precisely what we look forward to now. As we come to the Lord's table to drink the cup and take the bread.

[34 : 22] So as we come, think on the fact that this king died for us to cleanse us of our sins and to give us new life. Think also of that great wedding feast that it foreshadows to which all those who love Jesus are invited to come.

Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for this promise that you will come and right all of the world's wrongs. That when your king is coronated, your children will celebrate.

great. Thank you that you have put before us the possibility of real joy. Know the promise of real joy. Promises from a king who never broke a promise.

Stir our hearts with eager longing for your reign, Lord Christ, even now as we come to your table. I pray these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen.