

2 Samuel 23:8-39

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Preacher: Peter Almo

[0:00] Good evening, everybody. Wish we could just keep singing. If you don't know me, my name is Peter Almo, a member of the church.

I've been going here at least two years now. I've preached once before. I'm excited to preach again tonight. Please pray with me briefly before we start.

Lord, I thank you for those here tonight who are gathered. And I pray that you would prepare all of our hearts, Lord, to hear what you have to say here in 2 Samuel. Please allow the sermon to be glorifying to you, edifying to us here, Lord.

We pray this in Jesus' name. So I think this has been a really crazy time to be an American, especially if you're interested in politics. This really has been an election cycle to remember, very unique, one that we haven't seen before.

I doubt we'll see it again. And my plan is not to get too political up here. But it is clear that both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, they're upending traditional norms in American political life.

[1:15] And in so doing, they're raising fundamental questions about the country we were, the country we are now, and the country that we might become. And one area that is front and center this election cycle, particularly on the Republican side, is immigration.

And more abstractly, how do we process the history of this nation in regard to the immigrants who shaped it? And how, as a nation, do we think about our immigrants moving forward?

Now, a lot of ink has been spilt over the economic implications of immigration, especially illegal immigration, as well as the threat to national security, to say nothing of the cultural implications and the ever-evolving demographics of the melting pot we call our home.

And out of this deeply complex issue has come an unfortunate level of xenophobia, frankly, out of the right side. And I think that this is problematic for some of us in Christian circles, where conservatism is the predominant political position.

Though, not all the time. We hear pledges to make America great again, without making a direct connection, suggesting that immigration has played a role in America's un-greatness.

[2:34] And will perhaps be pivotal in deciding whether America becomes great again. I can only speak for myself, but as a conservative Christian, I do have a high view of this nation.

Its history and its role in the world's geopolitical future. All the while, being savvy to what our country has done, some of the actions it's taken in the past. Having said that, I have a bit of a recoiling to the idea that America is more or less a source of injustice in the world.

But, as a Christian, I find myself at odds with some in the conservative camp, when considering our posture towards the others in our country.

The people or groups that traditionally have been seen as non-American. Surely, we as Christians must have a kingdom view of the world, over and above a nationalistic one.

Jesus certainly compels us to embrace the others of the world, as we seek to show the world who he was and what he was like.

[3:40] Now, at this point, you're probably asking, what does this have to do with the end of Samuel? Pretty much nothing. No, that's just a joke.

There is a lot to glean here. And as we approach the end of 2 Samuel, we find King David reflecting on the greatness of the nation of Israel and his role in it.

And if you would, please read with me our sermon text tonight, which is 2 Samuel 23, verses 8-39. I'm going to do my best to get through the names.

I apologize if some of them are weird. This is sort of a rite of passage, I guess, when you preach. You have to be able to get through things like this. Starting in verse 8.

These are the names of the mighty men whom David had. Josheb, Bashabeth, a Tekemanite. He was chief of the three. He wielded his spear against 800 whom he killed at one time.

[4 : 41] And next to him, among the three mighty men, was Eleazar, the son of Dodo, son of Ahuai. He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle. And the men of Israel withdrew.

He rose and struck down the Philistines until his hand was weary and his hand clung to the sword. And the Lord brought about a great victory that day. And the men returned after him only to strip the slain.

And next to him was Shammah, the son of Agi, the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils. And the men fled from the Philistines.

But he took his stand in the midst of the plot and defended it and struck down the Philistines. And the Lord worked a great victory. And three of the thirty chief men went down and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Agilom, when a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim.

David was then in the stronghold. And the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. And David said longingly, Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate.

[5 : 49] Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it.

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? Therefore he would not drink it.

These things the three mighty men did. Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of the thirty. And he wielded his spear against three hundred men and killed them and won a name beside the three.

He was the most renowned of the thirty and became their commander, but he did not attain to the three. And Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, was a valiant man of Kabziel, a doer of great deeds.

He struck down two aeriels of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man.

[6 : 49] The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men.

He was renowned amongst the thirty, but he did not attain to the three, and David set him over his bodyguard. Asahel, the brother of Joab, was one of the thirty. Elhanan, the son of Dodo of Bethlehem.

Shammah of Herod. Aleikah of Herod. Helez, the Paltite. Ira, the son of Ekesh of Tekoa. Abiezar of Anathoth. Mebunai, the Hushatite.

Salmon, the Ahawite. Mahari of Natopha. Hileb, the son of Banna of Natopha. Etai, the son of Rebi of Gibeah, of the people of Benjamin. Benaiah of Pirithon.

Hidai, of the brooks of Gash. Abialbon, the Arbitite. Asmaveth of Baharim. Eliabah, the Shalbanite, the sons of Jashen.

[7 : 51] Jonathan, Shammah, the Herorite. Ahayam, the son of Sharar, the Herorite. Eliphelet, the son of Ahazbi of Maka. Eliam, the son of Atathophel of Gilo.

Hezro of Carmel. Parai, the Arbite. Egal, the son of Nathan of Zobah. Bani, the Gadite. Zelech, the Ammonite. Nahari, of Beiroth, the armor-bearer of Joab, the son of Zeruiah.

Ira, the Ithrite. Gareb, the Ithrite. Uriah, the Hittite. 37 in all. Wow. If ever a true treasure trove of deep theological truths and possibilities, this was it.

I slogged through that to kind of drive the point home that, frankly, this text is a nightmare to approach when you're writing a sermon.

At first glance, simply the names of David's mighty men, his generals and lieutenants, and brief glimpses of some of their exploits.

[9 : 02] What I will attempt to do while staying exegetical without completely putting you to sleep is take a step back, put on a wide-angle lens, and look at this passage within the larger context of what's going on at the end of 2 Samuel.

Namely, the ending of David's reign. David's reign, when considered across the long line of Hebrew history, a tumultuous history to be sure, was the apex of the socio-political grandeur of the nation. Which means that it was a good time. If you look at the overall line that Israel took, it's a lot of bad times.

And though David went through a lot and will continue to go through a lot, comparatively speaking, this is kind of a high point. Further bolstered after David, when his son Solomon completed the temple.

And we tend to view the Old Testament, in general, as Israel's time. When God was working exclusively with and through his nation.

[10:17] If the New Testament is largely about God's covenant blessings and promises going out to all the nations, that is salvation, then the Old Testament is surely about one and only one nation.

Israel's history starts slow and ends slow, with a high point in the middle. David's kingship over God's people. If we look back, we come across a number of key events that provide a framework for how the entire Old Testament informs the New.

If I were to quickly summarize it for you, it begins with God's covenant with Abraham. Then on to the exodus, out of Egypt and out of slavery. To David's anointing and reign, and Solomon's building of the temple, where God dwelt with man.

Then they go back into a kind of slavery with the exile in Babylon. They leave exile, are able to come back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. After a long time, we call that period the second temple period.

And finally, to the crucifixion of Jesus and the going out of the Holy Spirit to all nations. And what I want to focus on for the moment is the beginning of the framework and the end of the framework.

[11:46] Something incredibly important characterizes both that beginning and end. And that is a lack of the nation of Israel being central to what God is doing there.

It's buttressed at both ends by others, outsiders. Not an Israeli-centric event. First, consider Abraham.

Formerly Abram. Who was in no way Hebrew. Abraham was not Hebrew. He was not Jewish. He was not part of the nation of Israel. In fact, and I'm pretty sure most of the people here tonight are aware.

It wasn't until Abraham's grandson, Jacob, wrestled with God. That God changed his name from Jacob to Israel. And with his sons, do we only start to think about a nation of God's own people? And why that is so noteworthy can be found in the book of Genesis, chapter 15. I am going to look there. Genesis, chapter 15, verses 4 through 6.

[12:50] You can read along if you want. I'm going to read it. Starting in verse 4. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, Abram. This man, Eleazar of Damascus, shall not be your heir.

Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, so shall your offspring be.

And he believed the Lord and counted it to him as righteousness. It's interesting that God's referencing of Abram's true heir begins with Isaac, of course, but is also looking forward to both David, the future anointed king of God's people, and finally Jesus, the future anointed king of God's people.

And this covenant isn't established with, isn't sealed in, the nation of Israel or the Ten Commandments, but in the faith of one man. Then Abram's faith in the Lord, the faith of a Gentile, to be frank, was accounted to him for righteousness.

And that righteousness, through faith, is the foundation of the security that we have today as believers in Christ. All from the mouth of an outsider, another.

[14:13] And if we can briefly examine the other end of this framework, I believe we can start bringing things into focus. The going out of the Holy Spirit. This is after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

It's chronicled by Luke in the book of Acts. First the Spirit is poured out onto the apostles. Then Peter goes out to the huge crowds gathered in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost.

Crowds made up of Hebrews from all nations of the modern world at that time, which would have been the Roman Empire. And Peter begins to preach to them on what are essentially the promises of God's covenant with Abram.

Coming to full realization in Jesus and what he's just accomplished. And this is all found in Acts chapter 2. And I'm going to go there. Acts chapter 2.

I'm going to look at verse 17 first. Peter is quoting the minor prophet Joel. And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of my spirit on all flesh.

[15:16] Jump from there to verse 34, if you will, if you're following along. Peter curiously brings someone into this sermon. Someone who is so central to God's framework of salvation.

And that person is David. Verse 34. Verse 34.

So we've looked at the beginning of our framework.

Righteousness through the faith of another, an outsider. And our end of the framework. The Holy Spirit being poured out onto all who put their faith in Jesus. Not just the in crowd, the nation of Israel, the house David built.

But to all the others. So why go through all that? Why take the time to look at that? Well, it's so that we can now wheel back to 2 Samuel. And really contextualize what's going on in our sermon text.

[16:48] At least one part of the sermon text. So David is now at the end of his life. At the end of his reign. And it's a reign that has seen an unprecedented flourishing of God's people.

Into not just a people of God, but an economic, military, and cultural power in the world. From as far north as Syria to as far south as Egypt.

At the time that David ruled Israel. People now knew his name. And how grand that nation of the one true God had become. And so we find David here at the end.

Taking stock. Of what the Lord has done. And what he has accomplished. And part of that stock taking is an account of his mighty men. Recognition, to be sure, for the warriors who were instrumental in helping David achieve victory after victory.

And solidifying Israel as a real world power. If David is the glorious throne at the center of this shining nation. Surely these men are the host that adorns the throne with valor and glory.

[17:59] And what do we find tucked away in this host? Or rather, who do we find? You'll find him at the very end of the list. Surprisingly. Or as we'll see, not so surprisingly.

And he is an other. He's an outsider. And not just any other. But a man who serves as David's greatest blemish. Really. The man who causes us to pause.

When we think of David as a man after God's own heart. And that is Uriah the Hittite. You might be thinking, why Uriah? Why is this man, last on the list, so important?

Well, believe me, I think he's immensely important. And I think there are three distinct and significant points that make Uriah's place of prominence among David's mighty men significant. I would like to briefly refresh our memories. Then look a little closer. So we're going to stay in 2 Samuel, but we're going to go back to chapter 11, if you will. Verses 6 through 17.

[19:01] This is where we're introduced to Uriah. So David sent word to Joab. Send me Uriah the Hittite. Excuse me, this is not where we're introduced to Uriah. This is after David has done the deed, if you will.

So David sent word to Joab. Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going.

Then David said to Uriah, go down to your house and wash your feet. And Uriah went out of the king's house and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord and did not go down to his house.

When they told David, Uriah did not go down to his house, David said to Uriah, have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house? Uriah said to David, the ark and Israel and Judah dwell in tents and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field.

Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing. Then David said to Uriah, remain here today also and tomorrow I will send you back.

[20:22] So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. And David invited him and he ate in his presence and drank so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him that he may be struck

down and die.

And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab and some of the servants of David among the people fell.

Uriah the Hittite also died. First point of the three and the obvious one, Uriah was not an Israelite. He was a Hittite, which is a kingdom at that time occupied by most of what is now the country Turkey.

And the Bible often refers to it as Asia Minor. And the Hittites actually had a strong working relationship with Israel. They were trade partners and for the most part, congenial neighbors.

[21 : 39] So on a surface level, it isn't hugely scandalous that David enjoyed the company of a Gentile among his entourage. And I'm using Gentile here. I mean, this is a term that wouldn't have been used then, but we'll just understand it as a non-Israelite.

But to recap a point previously touched on, there are times when you get the job done by any means, and there are times for formality and decorum.

And David is giving an account of himself in our sermon text, his kingdom and his champions.

There's an air of both formality and finality to it. Might it be fitting to scrub certain things out, to clean up the record a little bit?

But this is a moment to step back and bask in the ending of a full and kingly life. So it is significant that Uriah is an outsider. And much more than that, and this is our second point, Uriah is the source of David's shame.

It's not the only source of his shame. David has made a number of mistakes. And if you read through the whole chapter, he just was dealing with his son Absalom. So there are certainly things that have shamed David.

[22 : 47] But I think Uriah represents David's lowest point. David debased himself and betrayed God in so many ways, so quickly.

I personally will never believe it is anything other than pivotal for how we interpret David, his dealing with Uriah. Consider the events and the sins that rapidly accumulate. During the time that kings go out to battle, which is the quote from the text directly, David was curiously and inappropriately at home.

Now, I'm sure, you know, the sermon was preached on that. Whole sermons can be preached on just the fact that at the time when kings went on to battle, David was not doing battle. David was at home.

It's a hugely problematic thing. It's a very sinful thing that he was at home. He then lusts after Bathsheba, commits adultery with Bathsheba, engages in lies and deceptions to cover his sin and conspire to murder, and finally murders Uriah.

This is the low of low. This is not backsliding. This is very evil behavior. And Uriah's memory is clearly a locus or a focal point for this entire heinous act.

[24 : 06] And yet his name is included in this list and honored. And finally, the third point. Uriah is the true servant of Israel in that moment.

This is my words now. This is my interpretation. He's the true man after God's own heart. The one who truly acted like the anointed king of a people.

It's not just that Uriah is a reminder of David's shame. He is the placeholder for what David should have been but wasn't at that time. Consider the text again.

You look back at verse 9. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord and did not go down to his house. When they told David Uriah did not go down to his house, David said to Uriah, Have you not come from a journey?

Why did you not go down to your house? Uriah said to David, The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?

[25 : 13] As you live and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing. I will not do this thing. Not only is Uriah the better man, the godlier man, having not even been an Israelite, he keeps shame upon shame on David as he points out that God himself dwells on the battlefield in a tent.

How could he seek creature comforts? And that's what David does. While God is with his people on the field, David is at home lusting, fornicating, and plotting murder.

Uriah becomes the prophet, priest, and king in that moment, and David the outsider. So again, I ask you, why include Uriah's name in this list?

Well, at this point, I hope it has become clear. I believe God deemed it quite fitting to have Uriah honored here among the list of David's mighty men, because Uriah was a true servant of God. A true servant when David was not. David, who was anointed, which gives him great authority, who was king, the great psalmist, and Uriah, the outsider, the other, a Hittite, a nobody, really, in terms of the nation of Israel.

[26 : 43] I believe strongly that God was the same yesterday, he is the same today, and he will be the same tomorrow. I believe that a strong connection or continuity exists between what we find in the Old Testament and what's going on in the New Testament.

There's a continuity that runs through salvation that we find in Scripture, or who God redeems and how he redeems them. And Uriah must be a glaring example for us to remember that God's plan, going all the way back to his covenant with Abram, was to call the nations of the world to himself and redeem them.

So here, at one of the highest points of Israel's military and cultural might, under its most celebrated monarch, does God show that his grace will go out to all people.

At a time when Israel should be celebrated most of all as a unique nation of God, for a unique people that are God's, God is raising up an other to bless and be a blessing.

And if you still doubt that I'm overplaying my hand, if you will, if you doubt that Uriah is a godly figure meant to be acknowledged and remembered, turn with me, if you will, to the Gospel of Matthew.

[28 : 01] If you are following along, this is definitely worth turning to. This is the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1, verse 1. Matthew opens with the genealogy of Jesus, his ancestry, wanting first and foremost to establish for his mostly Jewish audience, the foundation of Jesus' ancestry, his first-rate royal Jewish pedigree.

Starting in verse 1, just going to verse 6. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Son of David, son of Abraham. Matthew is following that salvific, that framework I outlined earlier. These two are clearly the most important names, certainly to a Jewish audience, so he establishes them first.

Verse 2. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram.

And Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nashon, and Nashon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

[29 : 30] And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of who? You guessed it. It's Uriah.

Uriah's name is here listed in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Do you doubt that God, in the inspiration of his holy word, intended for Uriah to be understood, honored, and remembered?

It's strange enough that Uriah would be honored and remembered at the end of David's life, having been such a source of shame to David, and an outsider, but to be included in the genealogy of our Lord and Savior?

It is a glorious thing, I think, to see God's loving grace remain constant from beginning to end, from Abraham to the cross, to see how important it was to God to have Uriah's word and deed carried out through history, so that even the gospel writer Matthew saw it as solely incomplete to provide an ancestry for the Messiah, leaving the name of Uriah unmentioned.

And I do think that's true. I think if it simply said, in Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, and, you know, period, it doesn't have to be, and again, I don't want to get into the, you know, how the gospel writer chose to write, but it doesn't have to be David and Bathsheba, comma, the wife of Uriah.

[31 : 06] He didn't have to include that, but it's there, and I think it's there for very important reasons. So what can we take away from it? What can be gleaned? What's our application? We always want to have an application.

Well, my hope is that first and foremost, for God so loved the world, is not just a New Testament truth. We should all now see, I hope, that God, from the beginning of creation, planned to redeem all people, and was redeeming all peoples, even at the height of his own nation, Israel, a nation

meant to be set apart, to be the example to the world of what God was like, but oh so often failed spectacularly at doing that.

while the quiet, humble, and pious Uriah exemplified more than any other at that time the character of God. And so more broadly, my hope is that we understand that we are not immune to the follies of Israel today.

And I speak more of us as a nation of Christian believers, American Christian believers. We are very much falling into the same sinful habits, malaise, and atrophy, in my opinion.

American Christians have fancied and honored themselves the Christians of Christians, part of a nation charmed and blessed, a nation of promise, a city on a hill, and as such, how we have treated the others of our society, how we have thought of them, has been downright shameful.

[32 : 41] Let us remember Uriah. We're not him, friends. Too often, we're the David of the equation. I'm speaking in broad strokes right now, of course.

I know that most of you don't fall into this camp. But for better or worse, we are part of a larger American evangelicalism or evangelical body of believers that is sending a message to outsiders, both unbelievers and other Christians.

God's salvation is for all nations, and our kingdom family is of all nations. So let our daily lives reflect that. Let our daily cares embrace that.

Please pray with me as we close. Lord, I thank you for this text in 2 Samuel. It is a difficult text. It is at first glance simply a list of names.

How do we possibly come to it and preach a whole sermon from it? You have provided, Lord, and I thank you that Uriah, you know, I believe was picked by you, Lord, was raised up by you to be an example of your character when David was not.

[33 : 49] And I pray, Lord, that we saw that tonight. I pray that I was faithful to the text and I pray that those here tonight learn from it. Please apply it to their hearts, increase them in wisdom and love, Lord, as we go out this week continuing to serve you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.