

Redemptive Failure | Fall and Rise of the House of David

David's (Chief) End

First Kings 1.1-4, 2.10-12; Acts 13.22-23, 29-39

11.6.22

¹ Ki. 1.1-4 Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm. ² So his servants said to him, "Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm." ³ So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. ⁴ The girl was very beautiful; and she became the king's nurse and served him, but the king did not cohabit with her.

***2.10** Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹ The days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years he reigned in Hebron and thirty-three years he reigned in Jerusalem. ¹² And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.*

***Acts 13** "After (God) had removed (Saul), He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' ²³ "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus... ²⁹ "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. ³⁰ "But God raised Him from the dead; ³¹ and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. ³² "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, ³³ that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' ³⁴ "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' ³⁵ "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' ³⁶ "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;³⁷ but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. ³⁸ "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹ and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.*

Last fall, we began looking at the life of King David. We got as far as his notorious moral collapse – his abusive “taking” (1st Samuel 8.10ff) of a young woman (Bathsheba), the wife of one of David's elite guards. And then David murders this elite soldier in order to cover up his affair and her pregnancy.

This August, we picked up where we left off – the fall and rise of the house of David. There've been a lot of brutal and heartbreaking events... intrigue ... grief... violence. I can't replay it all (get the video or audio online). And today, we come to the end, the death of the king and the rise of his son, named here, Solomon (one last sermon next week).

Let's dive in and look at David's death...and let's use the occasion to THINK about death (Sunday after Halloween!) Let's think about how people often relate and respond to death. Then we'll look at the Bible's understanding of death is (IS there a cohesive teaching on death in the Bible?) Last, let's consider how WE deal with death, the death of loved ones... how we'll face our own deaths.

Let's look at: 1) Reactions to Death

2) Understanding Death and

3) Facing Death

If we take notice of the cast of characters here, we find a kind of "curtain call" with some of the major players coming back for a final bow. AND notice how some of these characters represent what we might call common or stock reactions to death.

First, the servants and court officials represent the prevention/remedy approach, responding to death as a problem to be fixed. I'm glad to be surrounded by folks like this...I admit that I'm sometimes too lost in my own thoughts to be practical... On the other hand, we live in S. Florida and we're all probably more prevention oriented and safer than we think we are. We're fixers!

There's a problem and that IS that David is old and cold. They stack the blankets, but he keeps shivering. So, they decide to use "body heat"...they find this beautiful young woman named Abishag. This seems weird to US but there was no electricity, and this was a remedy.

We use certain fixes that future generations will find ridiculous... The point is: it's possible to get so fixated on preventing death that we fail to see the death of a person. These servants just want the old David back. They want him to be (what he'll never be again) manly and strong. Death is a problem to be prevented/remedied.

A second reaction is found in the long section I didn't read (most of First Kings CH 1). And as we hope to look at this next week (the very last sermon in this series) I'll only mention here: they see death as an opportunity. The eldest surviving son of David, Adonijah, knows his father's dying so Adonijah launches a campaign to make himself king in his father's place. He sees this death as an opportunity to be seized and he sees suffering as an absurd inconvenience.

BTW – an interesting and frightening article in this month's issue of *Christianity Today* on the growing trend of euthanasia in Canada (10,000 last year). Death is a bother to be managed (life is too!) It turns out that death/judgment are humanity's perennial fear BUT where there's NO belief in God as Judge and no fear of death – life becomes cheap and death an inconvenience.

The truth is: people, life, death are inconvenient. The more you let them IN... the more involved you get with people, the more inconvenient they are. Abortion, euthanasia and Adonijah all attempt to make people more convenient. Adonijah is impatient for Dad to die.

Then there's the PLANNERS. Bathsheba represents this type. She's been silent for like 20 years and in that time, she's become skilled at life in the court of the king... and the way royal things are to be done and NOT to be done. Nathan the Prophet urges her on (1.11).

There are arrangements to be made. David hasn't publicly named a successor and in the Ancient Near East this is very dangerous. David promised that Bathsheba's son, Solomon, would succeed David on the throne and Bathsheba's just being responsible (maybe a little political too but... she has a point; can't leave a vacancy!).

What we don't find in Bathsheba is ...grief. She makes this very brief reappearance to keep things rolling... "no time to grieve; we have a coronation to plan ...David has to make a press-release." She seems a little detached.

There's more to death than arrangements; there's grief and feeling and weeping and remembering. Sometimes the arrangements are a good distraction that keep us from being crushed...but finally you mourn...right?

And this is where the Bible's teaching on death can help us to mourn but also keep us from imploding. Death is deeply human and to focus on death simply as a problem to be prevented/cured or an opportunity to be seized or a responsibility to be arranged and executed misses the real significance of this experience.

Let me highlight three truths in the Bible's teaching on death: First, it's a part of life in this fallen world. It's the God-ordained limit set on the duration of human life. It's the result of sin and therefore inevitable and unavoidable. As such it has to be met with a measure of acceptance. "*A time to give birth and a time to die...*" (Eccl. 3.2)

Second, physical death happens ONCE to everyone who lives. The idea of a multiple deaths and rebirths in an endless cycle (reincarnation) is found in Hinduism but it's NOT found in the Bible and it's not compatible with Christianity. In the Bible, time and life unfold in a line and NOT a circle. Hebrews CH 9.27: "*people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*" This is the end of that line for David. His body remains on earth (until the resurrection) and his soul appears before God.

The last thing I'll say (and there's lots more we COULD say) and that is that death is mysterious. There's something both sacred and terrible about death. It feels both awe-inspiring and profoundly un-natural. And that explains why every culture is fascinated by death. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, death is to be revered and respected. The Bible will say BOTH that death is the final enemy (1 Cor 15.26) and "*how precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His loved ones*" (Psa 116.15 NLT)

Now IS there anything in today's passages that might help us to face the deaths of our loved ones and/or to face our OWN death? Let's look at: 1) The Death of Others and 2) Our own Death

David himself honored the death of others. He mourns and weeps and even composed and sang a dirge at the funeral for Saul and Jonathan. It's sad that no one is weeping for David... not Adonijah...not Bathsheba...

not even Solomon. They're trying to prevent the death, to arrange for the death and even to capitalize on it. But where's the beauty and mystery and tenderness?

Well... there was... this one symbol of warmth and kindness... It's the weirdest part of the story FOR US and that is this lovely young woman with the not-so-lovely name, Abishag the Shunammite. Eugene Peterson in his book on the life of David says this about the mysterious messenger of gentleness and comfort: "(Abishag) is a witness to the sanctity of death, a sacred presence to David in his dying and as such A QUIET REBUKE TO THE OTHERS in the story..." (p.219)

In some sense she's the opposite of Bathsheba. David sent for Bathsheba in order to TAKE her...but Abishag is given to David as a gift. He doesn't take her (sexually). She was a living reminder of that time he saw a beautiful young woman and arrogantly sent for her and selfishly stole her...but this is only pure kindness. (Again, I KNOW it seems weird, even perverse to us... but give it a chance.)

And did you HEAR the words that Abishag said?

She said... nothing. At least there's nothing recorded for us. She was just there. She was tending to the old king, once so strong and now feeble and freezing, covered by a pile of blankets... not killing giants...too weak to fight and too tired to sin. She's there when Bathsheba pleads for her son to reign when David died... but she says nothing as Bathsheba makes her arrangements.

It's not her eloquence but her presence. It's the very thing that's hardest to give when death is lurking nearby – we wish we could SAY something (We all say, "I never know what to say at a funeral or at a hospital bed") but maybe it's not so much what we say, it's just being there.

Abishag reminds us of Jesus. He was the Word from God, the very Mind and Heart of God expressed, made tangible and visible but HE CAME TO BE WITH US. In fact He became One of us – *"since the children share in flesh and blood, He (JC) Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives... He had to be made like His brothers in every respect"* (Heb. 2.14-15, 17)

He got into bed with us...He climbed into our deathbed. He dwelled among us so He could radiate life and warmth into us who are already dead... He makes us alive by His Presence.

David's death is so... factual... such a fizzle. But the death of Jesus Christ is so consequential. The whole story in the Four Gospels puts what seems to be excessive focus on the death... It was Jesus Christ's end, His purpose. He joins us in death... NOT from afar but intimately.

The preachers in the *Book of Acts*, so often make the contrast between the death of David and the death of Jesus. The Psalms seem to speak of David but some of these things just can't apply to David. Paul quotes the Sixteenth Psalm and says this: "God says, 'You will not allow Your holy One undergo decay'. But David...fell asleep (i.e. DIED!), and was laid among his fathers and HE DID undergo decay (it must apply to someone else!); but He (Jesus Christ) whom God raised did not undergo decay."

Jesus Christ's death ended in LIFE! If we trust Him ours will too! And when it comes to facing our death... David had a shadowy expectation of life beyond the grave. Jesus, on the other hand, shows, by His resurrection, a very real and tangible LIFE after death. And He invites us INTO that indescribably great victory OVER death.

If you receive it – if you stop...if you DIE to the idea that you're better than other people and that you've been a really good person and God will accept you on the basis of your love for others and your love for Him – if you DIE to trusting yourself and TRANSFER your trust to what Jesus did FOR you...YOU CAN KNOW THAT AFTER DEATH, LIFE AWAITS YOU and that changes everything – it sets us free from fear of death and fear of judgment

And for those who know this freedom Jesus Christ calls us to die every day. We've seen that His death ended in resurrection, and we become confident that our little deaths will also end in our good, growth and resurrection ...in our daily walk with God and with people.

To deny ourselves for the good of others will actually lead to our becoming like Jesus... Our little deaths, died in faith, will lead to little resurrections... and freedom.

He died our death so we could die His death – not that we atone for the sins of others but that we DIE to our desires and end up better for it. Happiness and Holiness are indirect pursuits (as we said last week).

And even our sleep (as Warren Gage reminded us) sleep is a rehearsal for death. It says that David will now "sleep with his fathers". It's a very common metaphor used throughout the whole Bible and we can...(I think should) use sleep as a nightly preparation for death.

St Paul's sermon (today's last reading) said of the old, feeble king, "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep... I'd like that to be said of me. Wouldn't you like the same – to serve the purposes of God in this generation and then to sleep and wake up ALIVE like never before? To die IN CHRIST and to rise IN CHRIST – this is life indeed.