

The Weight of the Crown

Shepherd of My People

2 Samuel 5:1-10

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Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, "You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off"—thinking, "David cannot come in here." Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. And David said on that day, "Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack 'the lame and the blind,' who are hated by David's soul." Therefore it is said, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house." And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him (2 Samuel 5:1-10, ESV).

All that he had to do to save his life was offer a pinch of incense and say, "Caesar is Lord."

In the year 155 A.D., the Roman city of Smyrna was caught up in a nationalist fervor over the veneration of Caesar. Roman society was held together with a common belief in the Roman gods. After the death of Julius Caesar, emperor worship became a prominent part of their culture.

Over time, hailing Caesar as "Lord" became a test of loyalty to the Roman Empire. The mingling of religious fervor and national identity became a powerful tool to unify the nation. There was enormous pressure to worship and honor the Roman gods, including Caesar. This was not merely a religious issue. It was also political and cultural.

Polycarp was the pastor of Smyrna. He was a disciple of the apostle John. In his old age, Polycarp was arrested and brought into a stadium with infuriated citizens. The proconsul said, "Swear, and I will release you. Curse the Christ." To this demand, Polycarp famously said, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"¹

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/getting-old-for-the-glory-of-god>

After multiple threats and attempts to persuade him, Polycarp was burned at the stake as the proconsul declared, “Polycarp hath confessed himself to be a Christian.”²

It’s quite a story, isn’t it? Dale Ralph Davis summarized a principle that he believes is underneath Polycarp’s courage and tenacity: “Gratitude is an excellent antidote for idolatry.”³ Often we think of gratitude as the antidote for discontentment or selfishness. That is true. But a God-centered perspective that leads to thankfulness creates courage and wisdom to live in a complicated world.

That concept captivated me this week as I studied 2 Samuel 4-5. After the death of Saul and Jonathan and after the soap opera with Abner and Joab, David is about to be declared the king of Israel. However, let me remind you that the books of 1 & 2 Samuel are not about Samuel, Saul, or David. These books are in our Bible not so that we’ll look at these leaders as mythological examples. First & Second Samuel are about God. They are meant to help us trace the hand of God through the messiness of life, especially the gray-zone moments.

God-centeredness is essential for navigating a complex world.

Chapters 4-5 recount the complicated environment in which David is recognized as king. Both of these chapters highlight moments that are connected to God’s supremacy over all things. I want to walk you through three sections of this text, using a key phrase. Then we’ll explore some keys to God-centered living.

“the Lord . . . redeemed my life out of every adversity” (4:9)

Chapter 4 details the assassination of Ish-bosheth and how David responds. Last week we learned about the soap opera connected to Abner and Joab, the commanders of Saul and David’s armies. Chapter 3 ended with Joab killing Abner in revenge for Abishai’s murder after Abner promised to lead the remaining eleven tribes in support of David. At this time, David has only been declared king in Judah, his hometown tribe.

Abner was a powerful military leader, and his death sent a wave of despair through the tribes controlled by Ish-bosheth. In 2 Samuel 4:1, we learn that when the news of Abner’s death reached Ish-bosheth “his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed.” Remember that Ish-bosheth was seated as king by Abner. Without this military powerhouse, the king and people feared an invasion by David’s forces.

² Ibid.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, [*2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 55.

However, Ish-bosheth is killed by people from his own kingdom. We learn the names of two men, Baanah and Rechab, who were captains of “raiding bands” from the tribe of Benjamin. These men led teams of soldiers who attacked neighboring villages and provided for the nation.

Before we learn what happens, the narrator wants you to know that Ish-bosheth is not the final descendant of Saul. Verse 4 tells us about a son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, who will reappear in the narrative. We learn that Mephibosheth was five years old when his father died. In the panic after learning the news, Mephibosheth fell, became lame, and was permanently disabled. More to come.

In verses 5-7, we learn about the death of Ish-bosheth. Under the pretense of coming into the house of Ish-bosheth for securing wheat, they stabbed the king in the stomach. Verse 7 repeats the story with more detail, a common feature in Hebrew narrative. Not only did they kill him, but they also beheaded Ish-bosheth.

They travel through the night via the Dead Sea basin to Hebron, the city from which David was ruling (v. 8a). When they present themselves and the head to David, their words are telling:

Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring (2 Sam. 4:8).

This seems a bit familiar, doesn't it? We'll come back to that. But for now, take note of how the men position their assassination: “The Lord has avenged my Lord the king . . .” Dale Ralph Davis points out how the mercenaries attempt to spiritualize their assassination:

They come with blood on their hands but theology on their lips, expecting that the latter will magically bleach the former . . . For them theology is not truth that lures us to worship God but technique that enables us to justify ourselves.⁴

It's an old trick of manipulation where spiritual-sounding language is used to cover human power plays or political maneuvering. Whether it's over-spiritualizing or adding religious language and symbols, it's an age-old strategy. Remember, Satan quoted the Bible to Jesus in the wilderness temptation. Just keep in mind that not every use of the Bible or reference to God is leading you toward righteousness.

David saw through their deceitful scheme. In verse 9 he leads with a critical statement: “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity . . .” These two men are claiming that they have delivered David from the shadow of Ish-bosheth. But it was David who would write:

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits... who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy (Ps 103:1-2, 4).

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, [*2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 53.

He knows that it was the Lord who rescued him from the challenges of the past. With that God-centered perspective, he can see right through their ploys, manipulation, and power play. In fact, it allows him to see the situation clearly so that justice can be done. As in the previous situation with the death of Saul, he orders the execution of these men. God-centeredness makes you less susceptible to manipulation.

“ . . . for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him” (5:10)

Chapter 5 records the coronation of David with all of Israel. The remaining eleven tribes sent their elders to Hebron to meet with David. In verse 2 they recognized David as king, based on the Lord’s will: “The Lord said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” It was at Hebron that David and the people of Israel made a covenant together. Thus begins the forty-year reign of David at the age of thirty.

Beyond the historical significance of the moment, it’s worth highlighting the God-centeredness of this moment. First, the elders quote a statement from God: “shall be shepherd of **my** people.” The elders are acknowledging the divine plan behind David’s rise to the throne. Secondly, their kingdom covenant was made “before the **Lord**.” The narrator clearly wants us to see the hand of God orchestrating all of these events.

The plan of God has stood the test of time. God’s promise to David survived the pursuits of Saul, the political maneuvers of Abner, the deceitfulness of messengers, and even the folly of David’s decisions.⁵ God is working out **his** plan. “Yahweh’s promises are certain, no matter how much resistance they may meet.”⁶

What’s more, David moves from Hebron to make Jerusalem his capital. It will be known as the city of David. Jerusalem was strategic because it bordered the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Additionally, it was considered a historically significant city since it was the city from which Melchizedek, the first priest-king, greets Abraham in Genesis 14. This becomes a model of leadership—both spiritual and political—that is ultimately found in Jesus as expressed in Hebrews 5-6.

Second Samuel lays the prophetic framework for a future prophet-priest-king upon whose shoulders the government will rest.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this (Isa. 9:7).

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, [*2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 61.

⁶ Ibid.

David conquered Jerusalem (v. 7) and fortified the city. And we see the God-centeredness of the narrative in two places:

And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him (2 Sam. 5:10).

And David knew that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel (2 Sam. 5:12).

“The Lord has broken through my enemies . . . like a breaking flood” (5:20)

The final section begins with a cautionary note. In verses 13-14, the narrator not only lists the children born to David for future reference, but he also highlights that David “took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem” (v. 13). This seems to be cautionary as well as informational.

David’s reign is tested quickly by the Philistines. Remember they were the ones who attacked and killed Saul and Jonathan. Now they are coming after David. The Philistines approached Jerusalem from the west, in the Valley of Rephaim (v. 18).

Once again, David inquired of the Lord (v. 19). When he received confirmation, he attacked and defeated the Philistinian advance (v. 20). When David was victorious, he said, “The Lord has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood.” David saw the hand of the Lord at work as his defender and deliverer. And the narrator also wants you to see the connection because he mentions that the Philistines left their idols behind. The God of David defeated the so-called gods of the Philistines.

A second battle follows (v. 22). David inquired of the Lord again. But this time, he receives specific instructions to attack from the south. God tells him (v. 24) about the timing of his attack related to a sign with the balsam trees. Our text concludes with yet another God-centered statement:

And David did as the LORD commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba to Gezer (2 Sam. 5:25).

God-centeredness is essential for navigating a complex world.

Keys to God-centeredness

It seems to me that this text drips with a focus on who God is. While David is making his way to the throne, making decisions, and fighting battles, God is all over this scene. And if we pull back from this text and consider the message of the entire Bible, I think you’ll see that God-centeredness is all over the place. That leads me to wonder about God-centeredness in our lives. What are some keys to God-centeredness that we see in this text and in the rest of the Bible?

1. A personal experience of grace

God-centeredness is only possible when you've experienced the power and beauty of grace. It begins with a life-transforming understanding of God's mercy to you. When we look to the New Testament, the life of Jesus, and the application of his death and resurrection to those who trust in him, we find that grace radically changes everything about us. And it causes us to see life differently, believing that the ultimate goal is to glorify our grace-giving Lord.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (1 Cor. 15:10).

2. A regular practice of gratitude

God-centeredness is lived out practically through the practice of gratitude. It's connecting our daily lives to God's provision and his care. It means intentionally linking what you see, experience, receive, and enjoy to the grace of God. A walk in the woods, a good meal with friends or family, a beautiful sunset, and a thousand other experiences become the means of saying "thank you." But it also means gratitude for his presence when life is hard and for his help when you have to wait. Thankfulness is our starting point.

For a few years, I've used, off and on, portions of the Book of Common Prayer. I have an app on my phone that allows me to listen as prayers are offered and Scripture is read. There is one brief prayer that is a part of nearly every day's reading: "As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and forever. Amen."

3. A steady diet of spiritual nourishment

God-centeredness needs to be fueled and recalibrated through spiritual nourishment. Through every day and every season, we need the means by which God gives us grace and reminds us about his centrality. We need personal prayer, reading the Scripture, and time for reflection. We need corporate worship with singing, prayer, fellowship, and teaching.

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple (Ps. 27:4).

4. A posture of trust

Finally, God-centeredness embraces a posture of trust. It's a mindset and a philosophy of life that operates from a baseline of belief that God can be trusted. Just listen to the words of David from Psalm 62:

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty

rock, my refuge is God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah (Ps. 62:5-8).

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