

The Weight of the Crown

David's Final Song

2 Samuel 22-23

Mark Vroegop

"The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation, the God who gave me vengeance and brought down peoples under me, who brought me out from my enemies; you exalted me above those who rose against me; you delivered me from men of violence. For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever." Now these are the last words of David: 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" (2 Sam. 22:47–23:4).

I'm not sure how often it happens or even exactly how it happens, but I received a notification from Google Photos that they'd created a "memory" for me. I often disregard them, but recently I couldn't resist. The taglines of "Vacation Memories" and "Family Moments" piqued my interest.

Frankly, I was taken aback. The montage of pictures was set to music, and the pictures selected were really good. I'm sure there is some artificial intelligence behind it all. But after about three seconds, I stopped being curious about how the montage was created, and I started smiling, laughing, and reflecting on some great vacation and family memories over the last year.

The collection of pictures served as a wonderful reminder of past events that might be easy to forget. And they resurfaced some emotions and nostalgia. I found myself thinking, "Aww, that was great. We should do that again."

So, how do you summarize or capture a memory when you don't have Google Photo AI at your disposal? Well, you might consider writing a song or giving a tribute. This is one of the ways that people have historically captured events with a view toward memorializing them. And that's what we have as we come to the end of 2 Samuel.

Remember that the book of 1 Samuel started with a song—Hannah's song. A marginalized, misunderstood woman received the answer to her prayer for a son. She wrote a prayer-song to express her heart. That's where this book began.

In chapters 22-23, the narrator pulls the storyline lens back. David has been restored as the rightful king of Israel, and the book is drawing to a close. What kind of summation or memory can we embrace? Or think of it another way. If you were the narrator, how would you capture the big-picture themes of this book?

The narrator uses a song and an oracle (a speech):

- *And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song... (2 Sam. 22:1)*
- *Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, the son of Jesse... (2 Sam. 23:1)*

Hopefully, you remember that the main character of 1 & 2 Samuel is not Hannah, Samuel, Saul, or David. It is God. And we see this focal point as the book concludes. We find a song that tells us to “look to God.” And we find a speech that tells us to “lead like God.” And all of these points toward a longing for the true King.

Song: Look to God

Chapter 22 features a song that may sound quite familiar because this is not the only place in the Bible where these words are recorded. The other place where we find this song is Psalm 18. The words are nearly identical.

Commentators suggest that the song in 2 Samuel was written for David’s personal use and then adapted for public worship when it was added to the Psalter. We’re not sure exactly when this psalm was written. The superscription in both places indicates that the occasion was “when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.” It’s possible that it was written at the end of David’s life with a historical perspective since it says, “all his enemies.” But it’s also possible that it was written earlier in his life.

Regardless, this is the song that the narrator chose to include at the end of 1& 2 Samuel to capture an important message about looking to a praiseworthy God for deliverance. The God-centeredness of the psalm is noteworthy. David surveys his life, and he’s struck with the hopeful help of God. David devotes 51 verses to this theme.

As we look at this psalm, if you are a Christian, I encourage you to consider the track record of God’s faithfulness in your life. Think about the memories in your life—the good and the bad. And remember how God has been with you. See him in your history. Remember how he was in the gospel. And remember how he was with you through every season, so you can look to him now, today.

This song could be divided into three sections: (1) proclamation, (2) reflection, and (3) affirmation. It’s similar to when we say, “God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.”

Proclamation (22:1-7)

The psalm begins with a bold and personal proclamation of God’s saving grace. In verses 2-3, take note of all the metaphors: my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my

stronghold, my refuge, and my savior. These are metaphors of strength, protection, safety, and deliverance. Many of them are connected to David's experience in the wilderness. He learned what it meant for God to be his rock, fortress, shield, etc.

What's more, these initial verses feature the word "my" eight times. So, this is David's personal experience. There are stories and challenges behind all of them. Some of them were particularly frightening. Notice the vivid description in verse 5. Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, translates verses 5-7 like this:

The waves of death crashed over me, devil waters rushed over me. Hell's ropes cinched me tight; death traps barred every exit. A hostile world! I called to God, to my God I cried out... (2 Sam. 22:5-7).

Yet the testimony of David's life is that God heard and intervened: "from his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears" (v. 7).

It's interesting and instructive that God uses the wilderness experiences to teach us really important things about himself. C.S. Lewis, in *The Problem of Pain*, writes, "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."¹ That's critical to remember, not just reflectively, but also in the moment. God uses and is using the wilderness to teach us things about himself.

Back to Google Photos. I often find myself not only reflecting on a great memory, but also being reminded to cherish the memory in the moment. It's one thing to have a sense of nostalgia as you look back; it's another to be present in the moment and cherish what is happening.

Reflection (22:8-46)

David then turns to a lengthy reflection on the ways in which looking to God worked out in his life. If we had more time, we could unpack this in smaller and more specific sections. Let me highlight the major messages with some selected verses as examples.

- God delivered David through his glorious power: "Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him" (2 Sam. 22:9).
- David experienced the saving power of God: "He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me" (2 Sam. 22:18).
- He acknowledges the connection between God's favor and his righteousness: "The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me" (2 Sam. 22:21). This is a little complicated. It's probably a reflection of an important lesson that the

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/422142-we-can-ignore-even-pleasure-but-pain-insists-upon-being>

narrator wants us to see. God was merciful to David in his righteousness and unrighteousness. He was rewarded in obedience and disciplined when he erred.

- God honors humility and resists pride: “You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down” (2 Sam. 22:28). This sounds strikingly similar to the theme verse that I’ve highlighted from 1 Samuel 2:4, “The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.”
- David acknowledges God’s empowerment of his life: “For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise against me sink under me” (2 Sam. 22:40).
- He recognized that God was behind his success: “You delivered me from strife with my people; you kept me as the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me” (2 Sam. 22:44).

We’ve witnessed this in David’s life, haven’t we? It’s one of the major lessons of 1 & 2 Samuel. God was the one behind, underneath, and leading David’s life. David is just a character in the story that God is writing. “God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.”

Affirmation (22:47-51)

David’s psalm now concludes with a heartfelt affirmation of what God has meant to him. As he’s looked to God, he’s not been disappointed. Sure, there have been challenging times. But time only served to prove that trusting in God was a wise choice.

He returns to the metaphors from verses 2-3, and he breaks into praise in verse 47: “The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation.” Don’t miss the word “lives.” It has the idea of both the source of life (like living water) and also one who is active, moving, and involved. David has seen God at work in his life, and he can’t help but praise him.

But he also sees this praise as something designed to be a testimony. In verse 50 we read, “For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.”

David concludes the psalm with a summary statement that takes us back to Hannah’s song. These two songs serve as the bookends of 1 & 2 Samuel. In Hannah’s song, the concluding words were “The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed” (1 Sam. 2:10). Now at the end of 2 Samuel with David’s words, we read this:

Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever (2 Sam. 22:51).

David extends his affirmation beyond his own life. He highlights steadfast love of God to him and to his descendants.

What a psalm this is! And what a summary of David’s experience with God. He looked to God, and he was saved! This text reminded me of the words of the writer of Hebrews:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before

us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted (Heb. 12:1-3).

If you are Christian, keep looking to Jesus. He is our resurrected King. He's coming again. Keep looking to him so that you don't grow weary or fainthearted.

Lead Like God

We come now to the speech or oracle that the narrator records at the end of this book. It's a summary of David's reflections and his thoughts on leading as the king of Israel.

Remember that the idea of having a king is a work in progress for the people of Israel. 1 & 2 Samuel are transitional books. It's a gray zone moment as one era is passing and another is emerging. David's reign was far from perfect. We've seen how messy it can be. But David will be a standard-bearer for the coming generations. Good kings will be described as "doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walking in the ways of David" (2 Kings 22:2). And the Messiah is given "the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1:32-33).

These are important words for us too. I've suggested to you that we're in the middle of a "gray zone" moment. There's a national election taking place on Tuesday. It's an interesting, important, conflicting, and challenging moment. There's a lot of division, anxiety, and fear. We live in an amazing country that still needs Jesus. So, let me encourage you to prayerfully vote this week and also remember that "gray zone" moments are wonderful seasons for renewal. A friend of mine put it this way: "Put your ballot in the box; put your faith in the King; put your hope in the kingdom that's to come." And just to remind you, next week we'll gather on the Lord's Day to sing, to pray, and to receive God's Word. On the first day of every week we reconnect with the most important, life-changing truth: Christ died for our sins. He was buried and raised again from the dead, and he's coming again.

So, what does David say? Well, after emphasizing that this is his oracle (v. 1), he indicates that God taught him something important. Notice that he makes reference to this four times in verse 2. That's quite a setup. Here's David's summary:

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 (2 Sam. 23:3-4).

David is talking here about the good use of authority. It's an important statement because to be human means to exercise authority at some level. Employees, bosses, coaches, husbands, wives, pastors, teachers, mayors, governors, and presidents all exercise authority. What's more, authority gets low marks today because of the failures of those in authority. There's a level of skepticism and devaluing of authority, and there are ways that authority can be abused.

But this text invites us to consider a different way—a kind of leadership that is marked by justice and the fear of God. Several years ago, Mark Dever spoke on this topic, and he gave three important points to consider:

1. Authority is to be used for good, to rule in righteousness.
2. Good authority is rooted in the fear of God. Being under God's authority makes one fit to be in authority.
3. Good authority bears good fruit. (The text talks about "dawning like the morning light.")

Dever writes this: "Good authority shines forth light, increases knowledge, and its rain brings fruitfulness. Good authority blesses those under it. And we all know that! That's why every kid wants to go over to the home with the good parents; every student wants to be in the class with the good teacher and wants to play on the team with the good coach; everyone wants to work at the company with the good boss. I could go on. Good authority reflects God's character and blesses those underneath it."

At the end of David's reign, he sees this reality. He lays it before us for consideration. And I hope that you'll consider this today. We need men and women who are followers of Jesus who will use their God-given authority in a way that points people to the goodness and grace of God—who lead in the fear of God.

There will come a day when 2024 will merely be a memory. You'll look back on this moment in time, and I hope (and pray) that you'll be able to say: "That was a season where I looked to God and led in a godly way. I looked to Jesus. I tried to lead like Jesus."

After all, our ultimate hope is him.

...his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 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 (Isa. 9:6-7).

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright and morning star." The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hear say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price (Rev. 22:16-17).

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