

Sermon 3: Establishing the Kingdom, 1 Kings 2

- I. David's Instructions to Solomon, vv. 1-9
- II. David's Death, vv. 10-12
- III. Solomon's Kingdom Established, vv. 13-46
 - A. Adonijah Liquidated, vv. 13-25
 - B. Abiathar Banished, vv. 26-27
 - C. Joab Liquidated, vv. 28-35
 - D. Shimei Liquidated, vv. 36-46

Homiletical Outline

- I. Solomon Established by Righteousness (vv. 1-9)
- II. Solomon Established by Inheritance (vv. 10-12)
- III. Solomon Established by Justice (vv. 13-46)

Intro: Proverbs 16:12

“It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness.”

So Solomon wrote in the book of Proverbs, and so we find here in I Kings 2. Yet I think--hope--most of us found this narrative a bit shocking. What is Solomon doing here? Why does his reign begin with four executions, each of which is narrated at great length? Some commentators argue that the author is trying to make Solomon look bad, trying to expose the rottenness at the heart of the Davidic dynasty right from its very inception. That's wrongheaded. The purpose of the literary artistry displayed in this passage is not to make you feel good about yourself by running Solomon down. “Oh, that violent king. Oh, that wicked regime,” you say, with just the tiniest coal of self-congratulation burning bright inside you. “Thank God I would never be like that.” “I'm not that kind of violent person.”

People of God, this text is designed to make you uncomfortable. It judges you, and not vice-versa. And it judges you by its straightforward narrative of how the Kingdom of God was established in the hand of Solomon. This was by righteousness, and it is supposed to be a righteousness that makes you queasy. When a king truly does justice and purges the land of evildoers, that means that a lot of us are going to suffer the ultimate penalty. The Kingdom is a gift, but it nonetheless demands total submission and perfect righteousness, both in its king and its citizens. If the cosmic justice enacted by Solomon makes you uncomfortable--good. It's supposed to.

I. Solomon Established by Righteousness (vv. 1-9)

So here we have the final charge given by David to Solomon in language that should sound familiar. How was it that Solomon would show himself to be a man? By keeping every word of God--not just some of them, but the ways, the statutes, the commandments, the

judgments, the testimonies. Every word of God must be kept. Period. The result of this is prosperity, on the one hand, and dynastic perpetuity, on the other. So this is the first kind of righteousness: to zealously keep the commands of God and walk in communion with Him.

The second kind of righteousness is just as important. This is judicial righteousness--to punish the guilty and reward the righteous. Perhaps David should have punished these men in his life. Regardless, the proverb "better late than never" applies here. "Justice delayed is justice denied," say the Rabbis in the *Mishnah*. But God is always perfectly just, though He sometimes lets thousands of years between the crime and its punishment. We know that a righteous judge will punish crimes. After all, Solomon himself said, "Take away the wicked from before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness" (Proverbs 25:5). To eliminate the wicked is a duty of kings. Being a traitor to the realm is wicked. In fact, treachery is the only criminal offense treated in the Constitution of the United States. So David urged Solomon to finish what David either should have done, but didn't, or else to continue righteous practices toward the friends of the king.

If this offends you, your conception of the majesty befitting a king is simply too small. The loyalty and allegiance demanded even by an earthly monarch is, well, perfect. To curse the Lord's Anointed is implicitly to curse Christ Himself.

Thus, there are two kinds of righteousness here: righteous walking with God, and righteous performance of the duties of one's office. These things do not apply only to kings; oh no. If you are a father, your call is to walk with God, paying close attention to everything in His word, and at the same time to faithfully perform the duties of Fatherhood by providing for your children and training them to know and love Jesus Christ. If you are an employee, you are to walk with God in that calling and do good work. If you are a magistrate, walk with God in that position and do justice. And so on. It was David's best advice after a lifetime spent in the service of God in a very prominent position, and it's still true.

II. Solomon Established by Inheritance (vv. 10-12)

Now, at the end of v. 12 we see the key word of this passage: "established." Solomon was firmly established. How? Well, by the death of David, who had reigned 7 years over Judah and 33 over all Israel. Remember how last time we saw that Solomon did not thrust himself forward; he was duly called by God to his position. Well, here we see the same thing. His kingdom was established by God giving it to him at the death of his father. He didn't work for it or earn it or steal it in a coup. It was given to him.

By the way, this explains the dynamic of v. 4. Did you notice the wording there? Solomon must be righteous in keeping the commandments of God "in order that" God might fulfill His promise to keep a descendant of David on the throne forever. Now, does God need any help to place a king on the throne and keep him there? Of course not. And if you go back to II Samuel 7, you see there only an unconditional promise, whereby God assures David that one of his sons will rule forever, period, even if he sins. Yet here, the promise is conditioned on obedience. What gives?

Well, this can be explained theologically. The promise is unconditional to us because it was conditional to Christ. If He had not fulfilled all righteousness, then we would never be saved apart from the works of the law. Ultimately, in other words, righteousness is required of the ruler of God's Kingdom. Yes, Solomon received the kingdom from his father just as Christ received the Kingdom from His Father. But to keep that kingdom, both were commanded to obey. Obedience was a true condition in the case of Christ, while it is merely a means for Solomon and for us. It is a means of showing our loyalty to God and walking before Him in holiness; it is a means of glorifying the God who has given us entrance into His eternal Kingdom and promised that we will reign with Him forever and ever. It is the path which leads to life, but (to us, since it is merely a means) it does not confer the right to life. God established Solomon on his throne, and Solomon's obedience was the means of establishing that throne. It's obvious that the throne was not a reward for being good--but equally obvious that being good is the only proper response to the gift of the throne. This is the relationship between grace and works for us as well. God has given us the right to reign with Him forever, and obedience is the only appropriate response--so appropriate, in fact, that we can say with confidence that those who never obey clearly never received the gift.

This also explains what we will read through the rest of the story. Remember, Kings is an explanation of why the exile happened. It happened because the kings insisted on serving idols. The kingdom was wrested from the descendants of David precisely because they did not establish their thrones in righteousness. So beware how you walk; Paul knew that he too, after all he had done for the kingdom, could be a castaway. The danger of apostasy is a real danger, and it can only be averted (yes, ultimately by God but) from the human side by David's advice right here: walk in the ways of God and keep His ordinances, and then you will prosper--maybe not financially, but spiritually.

III. Solomon Established by Justice (vv. 13-46)

So why did Solomon kill three people and banish another one, all of them under somewhat equivocal circumstances? Adonijah could argue that he was innocently in love with Abishag. Shimei had been promised his life and hadn't crossed back to his old home. Joab's statute of limitations had run out a long time ago. And Abiathar had gone to the wrong party. So is this really justice that corresponds to the righteous dealing counseled by David? Yes. In the literal level of the story, this was the only way to establish Solomon's kingdom. Kingdoms aren't established by passivity. Yes, God established his kingdom, but He did it through Solomon's drive and initiative. In the typological level, this "bloodbath" (four people don't have enough blood for much of a bath) foreshadows the ultimate judgment day when Christ will evaluate every human being based on whether he was loyal to the Kingdom of God or a traitor to it. There is no statute of limitations at the last assize. Things you did four thousand years ago can and will be brought up against you. Associating with and countenancing the wrong people can send you to hell. Violating the letter of the law can send you to hell. Being more committed to your own property than to God's kingdom will send you to hell! Brothers and sisters, do not take lightly the

message of the text, which is that God will establish His Kingdom and He will do so through violence that will make your blood run cold. Just as Solomon's glory is nothing to the glory of the lily, much less to the glory of the Word who created the lily, so Solomon's consolidation of power is nothing to the consolidation of power that Jesus Christ will someday carry out. I beg you to give up your darling sins for the sake of the kingdom! Stop that sexual indulgence, that innocent spending habit, that relentless pursuit of your own power and glory! To indulge in any of these things is to, like Adonijah and Joab, ask for your own destruction. This passage stands as a warning to anyone dissatisfied with the rule of God, to anyone who has been a rebel in the past and who now holds his life strictly by the grace of the Sovereign. In short, it stands as a warning to every human in this room. What will you pursue? What will you give up in order to maintain a total allegiance to the Kingdom? Christ tells us that true discipleship demands nothing less than our lives. So give it all to Him. No hot woman, physical or digital, is worth forfeiting your life over. No pair of slaves, no matter how valuable. No support of rivals to the monarchy of Christ, however "innocent" or short-lived, is worth forfeiting your place in the kingdom of heaven. Come to Christ, giving up everything for the sake of total allegiance to Him, and He will receive you. But forsake Him, and you will get the same bloody fate as Joab, Adonijah, and Shimei. The choice is yours.