

“The Singer’s Last Song”
Sermon Series on *The Life of David*
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First Presbyterian Church, Winston-Salem, NC
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(2 Sam. 23:1-7)

Introduction.

Last week I read with interest about the life and musical career of Aretha Franklin in the wake of her death on August 16th. I also learned about her faith. She was called the Queen of Soul, and her voice was legendary, but Aretha grew up singing in her father’s church in Detroit, MI. Even though she launched a career singing secular music in 1960 at the age of 18 and was one of the defining voices of the 20th century which helped galvanize the fight for civil rights and women’s rights, Aretha Franklin never forgot her roots in the church. Her faith was the foundation of her life through all the ups and downs, during the good times as well as the bad ones.

I watched a video of her singing one of her most famous songs – “(You Make Me Feel Like a) Natural Woman” – at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. It was taped back in December 2015, just two-and-a-half years before she died. You ought to see it. She was 75-years-old, and it was electrifying. It brought everyone in the audience to their feet and weeping tears of joy. It was one of the last songs Aretha sang in public, and it is memorable.

This morning we read about the last song of another famous singer, and it’s recorded in the passage in 2 Samuel we’ve read together today. David was the greatest king in Israel’s history, but he was also a poet and he was a singer. From his earliest days growing up David composed music, and you’ll recall from an earlier sermon I gave this summer that the way he happened to come into Saul’s court early on in his life was by providing beautiful music to soothe and calm the troubled soul of the king. Seventy-three of the 150 psalms, nearly half of those that are included in the Bible, are attributed to David. And 13 of them relate explicitly to incidents in his life.

I learned a lot about Aretha Franklin at the end of her life by the last song she sang. What can we learn about David and our lives in Christ today from these verses?

I. A Philosophy of Leadership.

In the 23rd chapter of 2 Samuel we find the last song of David. There are actually two final songs which are recorded at the end of this book of the Bible. The other one is in the previous chapter (22), and the verses we're studying today are often referred to the "last words of David." But if you look at the structure of the text, you'll discover that the words are written in poetic form. They are what is known as a chiasm. So that's why I think this is actually David's final song.

In these opening verses the king offers his philosophy of leadership, and he says that "*when a person rules over other people in righteousness, when they rule in the fear of God, they are like the light of the morning at sunrise on a cloudless day, like the brightness after the rain that brings the grass from the earth*" (2Sam. 23:3,4).

What we find in these verses is a picture of someone in leadership who realizes that the influence they have over other people is a responsibility that has been given to them by God, and they must regard it as a stewardship trust. David uses the metaphors of the sun in the morning on a cloudless day and the refreshing beauty after a rain which causes vegetation to grow, and what he's saying here is that a good leader provides the light of a righteous life to show the way which then results in helping encourage the refreshment and flourishing of the people they lead.

Note the two aspects of godly leadership David highlights in these words: 1) leading with righteousness; and 2) leading in the fear of God. What David is saying here is that when a person leads with integrity, honesty and moral purity, and when that leader lives his/her life with a reverential awe of the Lord, then that kind of leader will be a light in the darkness and help everyone around them become more productive and fruitful. So whether you're a CEO of a company, the captain of a team, a parent in a home, a coach in a kids league, the foreman of a shift, the teacher in a class, an officer in the PTA, or just a friend people look up to, lead in righteousness and in the fear of God and realize that one day you'll have to give an answer to the Lord for how you influence people.

Did you know that there's a difference between authority and leadership? The two aren't always the same. Have you ever thought about that? I once heard Tony Campolo give a great sermon about this, and he contrasted the difference between a person who is in authority and the one who provides godly leadership by the way they live their life. He said, "Pharaoh had the title – he was in a position of authority, but Moses had the testimony – he lived a righteous life! Jezebel had the title, but Elijah had the testimony! Nebuchadnezzar had the title, but Daniel had the testimony! Herod had the title, but John the Baptist had the testimony! And Pilate had the title, but Jesus had the testimony!" Do you see the difference?

Sometimes leadership has very little to do with who is in charge in any official

way. What it really comes down to is godly *influence*, regardless of what office you may hold or the title you may possess. Today with the advent of social media, this has become all the more true. Entire social revolutions have taken place all around the world because people came together and exerted their collective influence on their community and their nation.

Being a leader isn't about being in charge and wielding power. David reminds us it's really about living in a righteous and godly way, so you can serve and be a blessing to others. Recently, I read a story about one leader who learned this lesson. Indra Nooyi has been the CEO of PepsiCo corporation since 2006. When Indra, who is from India, was named President of Pepsi, her mother was visiting at the time. When Indra came home, she shouted, "Hey everyone, I've got great news for you!"

Her mother said, "It can wait. We need you to go get some milk right now."

So Indra went out to get the milk, and when she returned home she was frustrated and hopping mad. And she said, "I had great news for you. I've just been named the President of PepsiCo, but all you want me to do is to go out and get milk."

Then her mother said to her, "Indra, let me explain something to you. You may be President of PepsiCo, but when you walk in this house you're a wife and a mother first. Nobody can take that place. So leave your crown in the garage."

I wonder if Indra's mother ever read the words in David's last song about how to be a godly leader! A godly leader is someone who leaves their crown in the garage. Whatever influence you may have and wherever you may lead, do so in a way that demonstrates integrity and honesty, shines a light in the darkness, and provides refreshing nourishment to the people you lead so they can flourish and grow.

II. A Warning about the Future.

At the end of David's song, the poet king writes, "*But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand. Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie*" (2 Sam. 23:6,7).

Many scholars believe that here David isn't just referring to the way in which a ruler is supposed to deal with evil people in his/her kingdom, but rather he's also speaking prophetically about the coming judgment of the Messiah. It is a double *entendre*. There are two meanings to what is written. And it's about this latter meaning I want to say something today.

It's easy to become overwhelmed by the bad news we read in the papers or see on television or pick up on the live stream on our mobile devices. It seems that if it weren't for bad news there'd be no news at all, and sometimes it feels like it comes

as an avalanche of discouragement. But ours is not the first generation which has had to combat evil, and the struggle is as old as time.

The good news is that one day the Messiah, the eternal King, will return to the earth. And when He does He's going to "put everything to rights," as N.T. Wright has expressed it. He will rule with truth and justice and righteousness, and evil will finally be put in its place once and for all. Judgment is coming; of that you can be sure. And all of us need to live in the light of that promise. One day each of us is going to have to give an account for how we have lived our lives.

Evil never has the last word, and God isn't finished writing the story yet. One day the Messiah will return. In the meantime, we may wonder, with the psalmist (Ps. 73), why the wicked prosper. God must have His reasons. But rest assured, they will prosper only for a time. Eventually, God will settle all the score, and evil will receive its just reward – the punishment of a righteous God. So trust in the Lord and look to Him every time you experience injustice or encounter evil in this world.

Did you know that in the NT there are over 300 references to the Second Coming of Christ - about 1 in every 13 verses! Now, compare that with the fact that baptism is mentioned only 19 times in the epistles, and the Lord's Supper is mentioned clearly only 4 times, and you can see that the writers of the NT had a great belief in the reality of Christ's return. It was a matter of conviction, and it was a cause for hope to the early followers of Jesus. May it be to you and me, too.

III. A Promise of a Savior King.

The final matter I want to mention today from this last song of David has to do with the promise of God in the middle of the poem. There we read some provocative words in the light of all the ways David failed so badly and messed up over the course of his life. The poet king asks, "*Is not my house right with God? Has He not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will He not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?*" (2 Sam. 23:5).

When David asks these rhetorical questions, we might be inclined to answer with a loud, "No! Absolutely not! Your house is a mess!" Just read 2 Samuel 11-20 and you'll see what a wreck David's family really was and just how dysfunctional it ended up becoming. But the key in this passage are the words in the song "everlasting covenant." David's house is right with God not because it always acted in the right way. It didn't. Rather, it is right with God because of the covenant the Lord made with David back in chapter 7.

David's descendants would **not** always rule in righteousness, but as Israel's kings failed one after another, just like David did himself, God's everlasting covenant with the son of Jesse would create a hope and an expectation that one day

another son of David – a righteous Messiah – would come and lead and rule rightly. This king’s reign would be like the sun, dispelling the darkness and restoring creation.

That’s the hope David looked forward to. And the good news of the covenant that God made with him is that it wasn’t dependent on David. God promised He was going to fulfill His part of the bargain regardless of all the ways David, and all the kings who would come after him, failed to uphold their end of things. God’s promise was sure, and He kept His word and sent His Son Jesus to usher in the kingdom of God and begin His eternal reign.

The Good News of this promise wasn’t just for David. It’s for you and me too! God invites each one of us to participate in His covenant of love through Jesus Christ – the son of David. And it doesn’t depend on us to live a perfect life or to get everything right in order to enjoy the blessings of God. Jesus did everything that is required, and it’s through His obedience and His loving sacrifice on the cross that you and I can come into a right relationship with God.

Friends, you and I are more lost and sinful than we can ever imagine, but we are also more loved than we can ever hope. And by the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, the wide chasm that existed between God and us because of our sin and our enmity with Him has been bridged, and we can be reconciled to God through Christ.

Have you ever accepted God’s invitation of love? Have you ever received the free gift of new life in Christ? I pray that if you’ve never done it before, you would do it today. Begin the adventure of loving God and following Jesus this morning, and He will bring a peace and a joy to your life unlike anything you’ve ever experienced before. It’s a promise God made to David, and He makes it to you today, too.

Conclusion.

I began by sharing with you about one of the final songs Aretha Franklin sang. It was a celebration at which Aretha and several other artists were honored. She sang “(You Make Me Feel like a) Natural Woman,” which was co-written by Carole King, an artist was also in attendance that night and who was also honored at the event.

If you listen closely to the video, you’ll notice that Aretha changes the lyrics in the song toward the end of it, and she substitutes the word “He” for the word “you.” Instead of singing “You make me feel like a natural woman,” she sang, “*He* makes me feel like a natural woman.” It’s a tribute to her Lord Jesus Christ. *He’s* the One who made her feel accepted. *He’s* the One who came to claim her soul when it was in the lost and found. *He’s* the One who helped her name what was wrong with her life and start all over again. *Jesus* made her feel like a natural

woman, and it made all the difference in the world. This is one of the last songs Aretha Franklin ever sang in public, and it will reverberate in my mind and heart for the rest of my life.

What song does the Lord want to sing over you today? Listen for His voice. His melody can save your soul, and it can set your life on a brand-new path. I truly believe it. Amen.