

## David's Kingdom and the Supremacy of God

2 Samuel 5:6-6:23

On Monday afternoon, August 21, 2017, I headed over to the soccer field at Augustine School to observe a rare event along with the students and teachers at the school: a solar eclipse. For us here in Jackson it was only a partial eclipse, but some of you may have traveled to western Kentucky or to middle Tennessee to the path of totality, where the moon completely blotted out the light of the sun, creating the feel of night in the middle of the day. Another solar eclipse will occur on April 8, 2024, and it will be the last one we will be able to observe in North America for decades. So if you missed the 2017 eclipse, make sure you prepare for the 2024 eclipse. It is interesting to note that the sun absolutely dwarfs the moon in size. You could fit about 64 million moons inside the sun. And yet, when they are positioned just right, the moon can completely eclipse the sun, hiding it from view.

Why do you think Paul wrote in Colossians 3:2, "Set your minds on things above, not on things that are on earth?" He wrote it because it is entirely possible for smaller things, earthly things, to eclipse in our view what is most important: the supremacy of God. Like the moon blotting out the sun, we are all prone to allow the cares of this world to draw our attention away from God, away from his kingdom, away from what is most real. Last Sunday we heard an encouraging message from Psalm 73, where Asaph described his former envy of the prosperous wicked, and his former questioning of whether walking in righteousness before God is worth it. But then in verses 16-17 he wrote, "But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end." The sanctuary of God became for Asaph the occasion to see again what is real behind the eclipse. When we gather together to worship the Lord corporately, we are the sanctuary of God. Coming to church should be an occasion when we, like Asaph, have our perspective adjusted back to reality. By the hearing of the Word, God enables us once again to set our minds on things above, not on things that are on earth.

Have you been bogged down lately with the cares of this world? Perhaps you've been crazy busy with responsibilities and feel like you have had no time to set your mind on things above. Or maybe you're facing a financial crunch that has left you a sense of anxiety. Perhaps you have struggled with illness or chronic health problems that have occupied the bulk of your attention. Or maybe you don't really want to set your mind on things above because there is a cloud of guilt hanging over your head because of your sin, and rather than face it, you prefer to keep your head down. May the Word of God lift your gaze to things above this morning and strengthen your faith to keep your gaze there, fixed on the supremacy of God above all. As we walk through this passage today, I want to give three words of instruction that emerge from these stories about David's reign as king of Israel, all of them oriented to the supremacy of God and our need to fix our gaze on things above.

A first word of instruction that highlights the supremacy of God for us is this:

### **1. Seek first the kingdom of God (5:6-25).**

It was in 5:1-5 that David was anointed king over the entire nation of Israel. The rest of chapter 5 is a collection of four different snapshots from different times of David's reign, all of them together showing that the Lord was with David and established his rule over Israel. In the

success of the kingdom of David, we see a foreshadowing of the kingdom of God that would later be proclaimed and inaugurated by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the kingdom that will one day be fully revealed when Christ comes again. So as we note these snapshots of David's reign in chapter 5, let us see how they point us to Christ and his kingdom.

The first snapshot is David's conquest of Jerusalem in 5:6-10. Verse 6 reads, "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.'" The mention of the Jebusites takes us back to an earlier passage of Scripture, Genesis 15:18-21, where God promised to Abraham, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites." Many other passages in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua have similar lists of the inhabitants of the land, and every single time the Jebusites are listed last.<sup>1</sup> They were the last holdouts, the pagan people dwelling in the Promised Land whom Israel could not drive out. God's promise to Abraham had been left hanging for hundreds of years, not completely fulfilled, until the anointed king whom God had raised up for this moment came on the scene.

Jerusalem (then called the city of Jebus) had both natural and man-made defenses. So confident were the Jebusites in the security of their position that they mocked David by saying that they could station blind and lame soldiers on their wall, and David still wouldn't be able to take the city. But notice verse 7: "Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David." The account is very short and sweet. David won the victory over the Jebusites, capturing the city that would be known as Jerusalem or the City of David. Verse 8 is difficult to interpret, but it may indicate that David exploited a weakness in the city by sending his men up inside the wall through a water channel. As a result of his conquest of Jerusalem, David now held an ideal location for a new capital. Jerusalem was poised right between the north and south, lying just on the edge of the territory of Judah (David's tribe), but technically within the territory of Benjamin. Verse 10 concludes this snapshot with its main theological point: "And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts was with him."

The next snapshot comes in verses 11-12, where Hiram king of Tyre sends messengers to David, along with supplies and builders to build David a palace in Jerusalem. This action by a foreign king shows that David's kingdom now has international recognition. Again, the theological point comes at the end of the account, in verse 12: "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." Once again, the author wants us to see that this is the Lord's doing, and that the point of it is not to feed David's ego but to bless the Lord's people Israel. God stands behind the prosperous kingdom of David.

The third snapshot comes in verses 13-16, which tells us that David took more concubines and wives during his time in Jerusalem, and thus more children were born to him. Eleven sons are listed in this section. It seems there are two points to this snapshot of David's reign. One point the author is making is that the house of David is growing stronger politically. Multiple wives

and concubines are a sign of high status and power, and a king who has many sons is in a stronger position to keep his dynasty going after his death than a king who has few or no sons. So on the one hand, David is prospering. But it seems the author also wants us to read this account with Deuteronomy 17:17, the Law of Moses that specified that a future king of Israel should not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away from the Lord. David is apparently ignoring that law here, and it seems he is unknowingly laying the groundwork for a major failure to come with regard to a woman in chapter 11. Polygamy in chapter 5 turns into adultery and murder in chapter 11. May this be a warning to all of us that if we tolerate the “small” sins in our lives, we are only preparing the way for bigger sins to come somewhere down the road. I find it significant that of the four snapshots we see of David’s kingdom in chapter 5, this is the only one that never mentions the Lord, signaling to us that the Lord in no way approves of David’s polygamy.

The fourth snapshot appears in verses 17-25, which is an account of two invasions by the Philistines against David’s kingdom that David successfully repelled. After Saul’s death, the Philistines strategically decided to sit it out during the seven-year period of Israelite civil war between David’s tribe of Judah and the northern tribes who remained loyal to the house of Saul for a time. But once they heard that David had consolidated power over the whole nation, they determined it was their time to strike. They had already taken down Israel’s first king at Mount Gilboa; now they want to take down Israel’s second king. So they mustered in the Valley of Rephaim, near Jerusalem. David inquired of the Lord whether he should go up and attack the Philistines, and the Lord told him to go up. And once again, the account is short and sweet in verse 20: “And David came to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. And he said, ‘The LORD has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood.’ Therefore the name of that place is called Baal-perazim.” But later the Philistines came back again, and once again, David inquired of the Lord, but this time the Lord told him to pursue a different strategy by attacking from the rear. In verse 24, the Lord says to David, “And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the LORD has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.” And once again, David attacked and routed his enemies.

Stop to take in the total picture of this kingdom blessed by the Lord, and then notice the varied ways it points us beyond itself to the kingdom of our Messiah. David crushed his enemies and established Jerusalem as his city, but Christ crushed the head of the serpent and won for us the greater blessing of the New Jerusalem. David won international recognition for his kingdom, but Christ has claimed cosmic dominion, for all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. David’s house grew in part through his own sin, but Christ, who is completely without sin, has built a worldwide family of priest-kings in his church. David defended his nation from the earthly threat of the Philistines, but Christ defends his people from the attacks of the powers and authorities in heavenly places. David’s kingdom was established for a time because God was with him. Christ’s kingdom, the kingdom of God, will be established forever, long after all earthly kingdoms have fallen.

So that means our lives must be oriented to the kingdom of God, not the things of this world. A key diagnostic question that every believer should ask himself periodically is this: Where is my hope located? In other words, what is it that keeps me going, gives me motivation, energizes me

for life? Is it the prospect of advancing my career? Is it the hope of getting married and/or having children? Is it seeing my children become successful? Is it getting more money so that I can enjoy the things I have always wanted to enjoy? Is it being used by God to accomplish great things so that others will know that I matter? Or is it seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, regardless of what happens in all these other areas of life? May this collection of snapshots about God's blessing upon David and his kingdom raise our minds to things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, reigning over a kingdom that will one day be fully revealed and that will endure forever.

A second word of instruction that highlights the supremacy of God is this:

## **2. Revere the holiness of God (6:1-15).**

The ark has had an interesting history in 1-2 Samuel. It had formerly rested at Shiloh in the tabernacle up until the time of the high priest Eli, when the sons of Eli took it with the Israelites into battle against the Philistines, and the Philistines had captured it. First Samuel 4-6 tells the story of the ark's capture, brief time among the Philistines, and return to Israel, where it ended up in the house of a man named Abinadab for years, where it was marginalized during the reign of King Saul. Notice in 5:21 that when David repelled the first Philistine invasion into his kingdom, the Philistines left their idols on the battlefield, and David and his men carried them away to be burned. It may have been sometime after this event that David suspected the Philistines would attempt retaliation and try to take the ark again. So David gathered a national force of 30,000 troops to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord safely to Jerusalem, where it would come to rest and establish Jerusalem, not only as the capital of the nation, but as the central site of worship. David wanted his rule over Israel to represent the rule of Israel's God, not to compete with it, and so bringing the ark to Jerusalem is his way of saying, "Yahweh is king over Israel, and I am merely his servant."

And so the ark's journey began, and along with it went a great celebration. Verse 5 tells of songs, lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals. And then, tragically, the party came to an abrupt end in verses 6-7: "And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God." What in the world is going on here? Did God simply overreact to a well-meaning action on the part of Uzzah? After all, he was only trying to keep the ark from falling to the ground. What's wrong with that? Here I cannot improve on the words of R.C. Sproul:

"[Uzzah's act] was an act of arrogance, a sin of presumption. Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the earth. But it wasn't the ground or the mud that would desecrate the ark; it was the touch of man. The earth is an obedient creature. It does what God tells it to do. It brings forth its yield in its season. It obeys the laws of nature that God has established. When the temperature falls to a certain point, the ground freezes. When water is added to the dust, it becomes mud, just as God designed it. The ground doesn't commit cosmic treason. There is nothing polluted about the ground. God did not want his holy throne touched by that which was contaminated by evil, that which was in rebellion to Him, that which by its ungodly revolt had brought the whole creation to ruin and caused the ground and the sky and the waters of the sea to groan together in travail, waiting for the day of redemption. Man. It was man's touch that was

forbidden.”<sup>2</sup> To guard his holiness from desecration by sinful man, God had drawn sharp boundaries around the holy objects, including the ark that represented his very presence. And even if Uzzah meant well, his presumption in crossing that boundary could not be overlooked.

But David is really the one at fault here. David was in charge of the procession, and his failure is what put Uzzah in this position to begin with. According to the Law of Moses, in Numbers 4:15 and 7:9, the ark was supposed to be carried on poles inserted through its holes by the Levites, not on a cart pulled by oxen. David’s carelessness with the Law of God, and thus his careless regard for the holiness of God, is what led to this tragedy. But in the moment, David became angry, assuming that God was too capricious and unpredictable to continue with the plan of bringing the ark to Jerusalem. So he took it aside to the house of one Obed-Edom, where it stayed for three months.

But three months later, David received word that the house of Obed-Edom had been greatly blessed in those three months. His crops were yielding tremendously, his business endeavors were prospering, his household was full of good health. And at that point David realized: God is not capricious. The ark is not a danger to those who obey the Lord with it. God is holy and to be feared, but he is also good and eager to bless his obedient people. So it’s time to bring up the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem the correct way. The obedient way. David’s repentance here is very subtly indicated, but it is there. Notice verse 13: “And when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal.” The ark is no longer on a cart. It is being carried the way the Law commanded.

We live in a society that has little familiarity with the concept of holiness. Most people do not think of God as transcendent, sovereign Creator and Ruler of all things, the one from whom, to whom, and through whom are all things, the one to whom we belong and to whom we owe everything. They think of God as a supportive friend who comes alongside us when we have problems. Or, as Michael Horton has said, they think of God as one who plays a supporting role in the movie about my life. But as this story makes clear, God will not play a supporting role, not even for David. God remains always true to himself, and the appropriate response on our part is to revere him, to stand in awe of him, and to respect the boundaries that he has drawn for us. Revere the holiness of God.

And then a third word of instruction for us that highlights the supremacy of God is this:

### **III. Live before the face of God (6:16-23).**

As the ark processed into Jerusalem, David led the procession wearing a linen ephod, which was not in keeping with normal royal attire. And his behavior was not in keeping with the normal reserved dignity of a king. He danced before the Lord with great exuberance, to the point that his wife Michal saw him from her window and immediately despised him for this embarrassing behavior. And she decided at that moment that at her next opportunity she would give him a piece of her mind.

Once the festivities concluded in the city, with the ark now resting in a tent in Jerusalem, and David having blessed the people and given them a generous portion of food, David headed back to his home to give the same blessing to his own household. But before he entered the royal estate, Michal came out to meet him, and she attempted to cut him with these sarcastic words (v.

20): “How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!” Michal believes David has defiled his royal office by acting out of accord with royal décor and protocol. Kings don’t dress like this, and kings don’t behave like this. She even accuses him of having a sexual motive in behaving this way in front of the maidservants of Jerusalem.

But David will have none of it. Verses 21-22 read, “And David said to Michal, ‘It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD—and I will celebrate before the LORD. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.’” You may read this response and think this is nothing more than an emotional marital quarrel. But it’s actually much more than that. This is David’s stance against his wife’s disdain for his humble and joyful worship of the Lord. Instead of leading the ark into Jerusalem in a way that put all the emphasis on himself as the king, David led the procession in a way that humbled himself and exalted the Lord. And David made it clear that he would continue to do things that Michal despised in order to honor the Lord. As Christians, we value marriages that are joyful and harmonious. And we tell married couples they have to work at this, and we fight for them and with them. But a happy marriage is not the highest value we have. If Jesus said in Matthew 10:34 that he did not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword, then it stands to reason that sometimes that sword will even come between husbands and wives. So let me say it this way: if your spouse is trying to hinder you from following the Lord, you have to become content with some friction between the two of you. Because the one thing you must not sacrifice for a happy marriage is obedience to the Lord.

David knew that, and in a very clear way he said to Michal: I live my life before the face of God, not before you. I seek his approval, not yours. And I will continue to humble myself before him, whether you like it or not. And the end of the story shows us that God vindicated David over Michal. Verse 23 reads, “And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.” There are many barren women in Scripture who were faithful women of God, but in this instance, childlessness was a curse from God for Michal’s disobedience. And did you notice that three times in these verses she is referred to as “Michal the daughter of Saul” (vv. 16, 20, 23)? The author is emphasizing that through this curse of childlessness, God kept the bloodline of Saul from intermingling with the bloodline of David. His judgment on the house of Saul was a complete judgment, not even allowing Saul’s daughter to participate in the continuation of the royal house of David.

Let this story be a reminder to you to love the approval of God more than the approval of others. Don’t seek the approval of a world that hates God. Don’t crave popularity with a culture that pretends not to know what a boy is and what a girl is. But even the people you love—your parents, your in-laws, your own spouse—do not have a greater claim upon you than the Lord does. As David was willing to humble himself to exalt the Lord, even if it meant being despised by Michal, let us do the same, whatever the cost may be in terms of the approval of others.

Set your mind on things above: the supremacy of God, his kingdom, his holiness, his absolute claim over you. Do not allow the cares of this world to eclipse what matters most. Now I want to draw your attention to one last feature of this story. You notice that David was dressed in a linen

ephod. This was a priestly garment. There is no clear indication in the story that David ever usurped the role of the Levitical priests, but he does seem to carry himself here in a priestly role. Moreover, 2 Samuel 8:18 will say that David's sons were priests, which again may indicate only that they engaged in some priestly activities without usurping the role of the Levitical priests. Here's a question: on what basis would David, of the tribe of Judah (not the priestly tribe), assume that he had any right to present himself as a priest?

As it turns out, there are two major priesthoods mentioned in the Old Testament. One of them is the Levitical priesthood, the descendants of Moses' brother Aaron, who carried out their priesthood under the Mosaic Law. But there was also an older priesthood associated with a man named Melchizedek, a man who is identified in Genesis 14 as king of the city-state known as Salem and priest of God Most High. When Abraham came back from a military triumph, Melchizedek came out with bread and wine that he distributed to the troops, and then he blessed Abraham. As it turns out, that city-state of Salem later came to be known as Jeru-Salem after David conquered it. It may be the case that David inherited the priesthood of Melchizedek as a result of his acquisition of the kingship of Jerusalem. You notice in this story that, like Melchizedek, David also distributed food to the people and spoke a word of blessing over them. All of these narrative details may shed light on David's words in Psalm 110, where he says of the Messiah who would come from his line, "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek'" (Ps. 110:4). As the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 7, Jesus Christ is a greater high priest than all the Levitical priests because his priesthood surpasses theirs. The priestly order of Aaron was but a shadow of a priesthood that was older and far more enduring.

What that means for us today is that setting your mind on things above begins with setting your mind on Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God as both priest and king. He is there interceding as high priest for his people, shielding them from the wrath of God that they deserve by the presentation of his completed sacrifice in the heavenly tabernacle. Because of Christ our high priest, the sharp boundary between God and man that Uzzah crossed to his death is a boundary that no longer exists. When Jesus died in place of his people, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, giving us the legal right to dwell in the presence of a holy God without being consumed. But that is only the case for those who are in Christ. And if you are not in Christ today, I want to warn you that the wrath of God could break out against you at any moment. You will stand before him one day. Nothing is more certain than that. Your only hope to be welcomed into his presence instead of being exiled into an eternity of separation from him is Jesus Christ. Look to him in faith, and be saved from the wrath to come. Follow him in baptism to declare that your only hope is Christ.

I want to invite those of you who are believers in Christ, who have professed your faith publicly, and who are members accountable to a local church to eat and drink with us as we renew our faith in our high priest once more at his table. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11; Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 12:8.

<sup>2</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, rev. and expanded ed. (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1998), 108.