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Enemies and Heroes of the Kingdom II Samuel 23

Intro: We have spent the last 2 weeks looking thru King David's rear-view mirror. We've poured over David's Song of Thanksgiving, a song that has recounted not only **how YAHWEY** had brought deliverance & freedom to David, but (**more importantly**) **why YAHWEY** did this. This divine deliverance wasn't granted because David was a great & powerful king but because **YAHWEY** is a great & powerful God! But enough of the past. As we move into **ch23**, it's time to go **back to the future**. David turns the focus of his writing from what **YAHWEY** has done for him in the past towards what **YAHWEY** has promised to do for him, for his family, for Israel & for the world in the ages to come.

This portion of the chapter only 7 verses & some of the material has already been dealt with extensively in our study of **I & II Sam**. So as to not belabor the point, we will address David's comments in **vs1-7** as they relate to the future **kingdom of God** & His eternal, appointed & anointed King.

1- It's not that these verses constitute the last words David spoke from his deathbed – they simply express the heart longing & desire of David at the end of his life. You might say these are David's last words "on record" – last words with a focus not on the past but on the future. That would be pretty rare: most deathbed quotes deal with the past, of failures, disappointments or even current events. John Adams & Thomas Jefferson were political rivals for their entire careers. Both died on July 4th, 1826 – 50 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson's last recorded words were a question: "**Is it the 4th?**" He died early that morning. John Adams last words spoken later that evening; were reported to be, "Thomas Jefferson survives." He was wrong, of course.

These "last words" of David are nothing like that. They might better be compared to the blessing of Isaac (**Gen 27**), Jacob (**Gen 49**) & Moses (**Deut 33**) before their deaths. The only difference is that David's last words are not a "blessing" on a person but rather a **prophecy** about the kingdom. While **ch22** looks back on **how YAHWEY** established the kingdom under David, the **prophecy** in **ch23** looks forward to **how YAHWEY** will **consummate** the

kingdom under **JC**

David also gives us his credentials here so that there is no doubt as to who or where this statement came from.

2-3a- Certainty of the kingdom - how do you keep a Cajun in suspense?
Sure enough, David makes us wait for his actual prophecy (**3b-4**). Before we get to that we are given a rather lengthy introduction. The writing is deliberate – David’s in no hurry here. This intro does what any good intro should do – it informs us on how we are to receive what it is introducing. Thus, the message we are about to receive is a divine communiqué. David declares that **YAHWEY** has spoken with him & thus, David’s tongue will be uttering **YAHWEY**’s word. What David’s passing on is nothing but what the God & Rock of Israel has declared. David’s repetition should get our attention too. He wants us to understand that what he’s saying is not David’s **guess** or **wishful thinking**; it’s **YAHWEY**’s promise. It’s not human insight but divine decree & if it’s God’s word then it is a sure word & can be relied on; it can be depended on

5- David offers **certainty** again here. He knows that the hope of Israel that will be realized in the future ruler is just the divine fulfillment of the everlasting covenant that **YAHWEY** had already made with him (**7:12-16**) **ordered & secure** (**5**). All of this is needful for the church because we would never conceive of a coming kingdom by looking at our personal experiences. The world is degenerating into chaos, not rising into civilization. Many Christians experience uncertainty & suffering, wondering how it all fits into God’s plan. What David is telling us here is that kingdom hope is not a matter of **personal experience** but of divine revelation. The coming kingdom is not a **political proposal** but a divine **certainty**. We may never find certainty in our circumstances but we will always find it in God’s Word!

3b-4- Appeal of the kingdom – “Ruler over mankind – righteous; Ruler – fear of God” David sees a **universal** Ruler who is both **righteous & legitimate** (fear of God infects His rule). **Vs4** provides imagery of light, sun, rain, grass= the reviving, refreshing, renewing effects of this ruler’s reign. Freshness & vitality characterize His kingdom. David points to a coming universal Ruler who rules righteously & therefore renews & refreshes everything & everyone He rules!

Clearly, David refers to the Messiah. He believes the ruler to be a Davidic king from David's dynasty (**house**). He's speaking of the final Representative of his dynasty; the last David: **Jesus Christ**; a Ruler both **righteous** & **refreshing**, who will **not abuse** or **misuse** His subjects but **refreshes** & **nurtures** them. The kingdom is **appealing** because the King is **appealing**. The King is so attractive precisely because we have seen so little of this type of ruler. Where, in human history, have we ever seen a ruler so controlled by godly fear & personal righteousness that his reign actually revives & renews His people? No where! Whether elected or imposed, we're just used to leaders of this age being immoral, corrupt, oppressive & power-hungry. They all tend to decimate rather than relieve their people.

6-7- Limit of the kingdom – Sad truth is that not everyone **wants** the kingdom to come. Some want nothing to do with a righteous Ruler's reign. That idea doesn't **appeal** to them at all; doesn't **attract** them; **draw** them. These are the **sons of rebellion** (Belial), the **godless**. If the Messiah is like "**light**" (4), the godless are like "**thorns**" (6); if He brings **freshness** (4) they inflict **pain** (6-7a). Because of this, they will be **excluded** from the kingdom they so despise; they will be "**thrust away**" (6a) & "**totally burned with fire on the spot**" (7b). Thus, the coming kingdom involves both **1) restoration** & **2) destruction**, both **salvation** & **judgment**. The coming King will purge out all who want no part of His righteous reign & who refuse to submit to the righteous King. We see this truth often in the Lord's parables, the separation of: wheat & tares; good fish & bad; sheep & goats. In this sense, Messiah's kingdom will have boundaries & the godless will be outside those boundaries. In this sense, the kingdom of God is exclusive!

This is not a popular topic in the contemporary church. A gospel of all-inclusiveness is more in vogue. It seems most church leaders are hesitant to draw too fine a distinction between the sons of God & the sons of Belial. But the Bible doesn't have any problem making this distinction (**Rev 21:8, 27; 22:15; Isa 66:24**). The world does not benefit from blurring this distinction & doing so just seals the eternal fate of those who think they are ok!

The rest of **ch23** is a series of portraits; a list of names meant to recognize the soldiers who faithfully served David & his kingdom over the years. David was nothing without his mighty men & they were nothing without him. We must also remember that many of these didn't start out as mighty men but

were distressed, indebted & discontent people.

8-12- There are some amazing feats of courage & strength in these verses: Josheb taking down 800 men; Elaezers fused sword handled, Shammah defending a field. Each episode required a massive dose of courage from these men to stand alone & turn the tide in the face of overwhelming odds. But, if you think this was written merely to praise human fortitude, you're wrong! **Vs10&12** reveal the real secret behind all this success: "**The Lord brought about a great victory.**" Now, this doesn't discount the courage & daring of David's 3 top warriors. They showed all that & more. But behind all that battlefield bravery stands the fact that the victory was simply **YAHWEY's** gift to them. Sure, they had to go out & get it but that's just it: **YAHWEY used** their courage & nerve to bring about His great victory; in the end, their victory / deliverance was all His doing. All God's servants must know this secret lest we fail to see our success as a gift & turn it or ourselves into an idol!

13-17- This appears to be an anonymous trio. This event may have taken place early in David's reign. Regardless, he's thinking out loud again; pining away for a cup of water from his old home-town in Bethlehem. These 3 guys overhear it & decide to make David's wish their command & at great risk to themselves. They didn't sneak into town under cover of darkness; they cut their way thru Philistine lines of defense. They fought Philistines to obtain this prize & the odds were **not** good but they don't call them mighty men for nothing! They weren't just tough – they were durable! The round trip itself covered 25 miles but they got what they wanted & brought back David's wishful delight.

But, David refused to drink it! I don't know which would offend me most: going so far for a drink of water or watching him pour it out. Strangely, David response didn't incite their **anger** but their **admiration**! See, in their minds, this is not an act of **waste**; it's an act of **worship**! David couldn't believe the risk his men ran – they could have all been killed! So, even tho it's the water of Bethlehem, to David it represents the blood of his men. Now, blood **belongs** to the Lord so David didn't dare drink it. He pours it out not because it was **trash** but because it was a **treasure** – it **belonged** to God. David, **awed** by the action of his men, was willing to forgo the fulfillment of his desire in order to honor his God. There are times when the sacrifices of others for our benefit leave us in awe. What to do? Honor the Lord with it!

18-39- 2 kinds of entries: brief anecdotal mentions of Abishai & Benaiah, then a list of names. Abishai's spear was lethal (300). Intimidation wasn't in Benaiah's vocabulary, unless he was providing it. He stalked lions not visa versa! This guy's tough! He defeated a big Egyptian with a large spear when he was only armed with a stick. The rest is a less exciting list of the remainder of "the Thirty;" no action – just an honor roll of David's elite fighters. The term "thirty" probably serves more as a group name rather than a precise number. Over the years, some would fall in battle & others would replace them. But their names are here – each one part of David's most esteemed & loyal troops. Their names are here because they excelled in their calling – fighting for & being faithful to David's kingdom. Since David was **YAHWEY**'s covenant king, their fighting constituted fighting for the kingdom of God on this earth! They were kingdom servants & because they fought well = they made the list. Their work was not forgotten.

The Bible must love lists, it has so many of them. Could it be that God delights in naming the names of His people? The Lord sees everything we do & every motive behind it. Those whose motives in service are pure will be honored.

Uriah- After reading this long list of heroes, what goes thru your mind when you get to the last entry? Nothing good! What memories this mention conjures up: lust, adultery, murder, destruction. Here, at the end of the list of heroes, we're thrown back into the mess of **II Sam 11-12**. Is there no escape? Not here. The list ends with a thud. But is it the writer's intention that we relive the horrors of David's sin & Uriah loss? Not necessarily. In fact, he may intend for us to move passed that because the solution for **II Sam 11-12** was the **grace of God**. So, David's wickedness should move us forward to the grace of God. I'm sure there are memories in every believer's life that haunt them: **silly, stupid, rebellious, sinful** things. But these memories need not **haunt** us for the rest of our lives, not if they **humble** us instead.

(I Cor 15:9-10) No matter how bad your former life was, I doubt it can hold a candle to Paul's lost actions. What was this only redeeming factor: the **grace of God**! Paul persecuted the church & the memory of that could have been paralyzing but Paul allows it to humble him (**least, unworthy**) & this humility moves him from the despair of that memory into walking in the **grace of God**.

God's grace isn't just for kings & apostles. When our most appalling memories are immersed in divine grace, there may still be a holy sadness, a godly grief or a broken heart but the memories no longer haunt us. Isn't that just like the Bible – even in the midst of a military list – one runs into God's grace! This just goes to show that even our failures can encourage us – if they've been covered & redeemed by God's amazing grace! 😊