

2 Samuel 20-24.

‘Facing Expectation and Reality.’

The dangers of kings.

Travelling in time.

In the last two talks we have traversed a lot of ground.

I wish that we had more opportunity to look at some of the detail between chapter 12 and 20.

However, we simply don't have time to do this.

And so, what I want to do in this last talk is to look at chapters 21-24.

These chapters represent a sort of ‘theological reflection’ on 2 Samuel 7-20.

In fact, these chapters represent a theological summary of the whole two books of Samuel.

But before we look at the chapters closely we need to engage in some time travel.

So tighten your seat belts.

Let's travel back in time.

Now I want you to notice the scenery as we go back in history.

First we look at David's return to Jerusalem in chapter 19.

Then the death of his son Absalom after he had deposed David.

Absalom's killing of his brother Amnon.

Amnon's rape of Tamar.

David's murder of Uriah.

David's rape of Bathsheba.

God's covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7.

The installation of the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem.

David's capture of Jerusalem after he is made king.

The death of Saul.

His guerilla existence during the time of Saul.

The kingship of Saul.

And finally, our destination – 1 Samuel 8.

And as we get out and look around the scenery is very different to that we have become used to.

There is no David.

There is no Saul.

In fact, there are no kings of Israel.

Kingship is unknown in Israel.

Israel is ruled directly by God.

Through the Spirit God raises up people called 'judges' who rule over his people.

And in chapter 8 of 1 Samuel the last of those judges, a man called Samuel, is old.

The surrounding nations are growing more and more powerful.

The stability of Israel is under threat.

And there is no candidate who can take over from Samuel.

They have not possible leader.

And so they look for alternatives.

And they want an alternative that is more lasting.

They want a king.

A king would bind them together.

A king would supply what they needed.

A king would be a potent weapon against the foreign threat.

But Kingship is a dangerous thing.

Samuel knew that.

And God knew that.

He had warned them in Deuteronomy 17.14-20.

Read it with me.

Warnings about kings.

- **Deuteronomy 17.14-20.**

¹⁴ When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," ¹⁵ be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite. ¹⁶ The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." ¹⁷ He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. .

¹⁸ When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. ¹⁹ It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees ²⁰ and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. (NIV).

But in 1 Samuel 8 God is even more explicit.

Let me read 1 Samuel 8.10-17 to you.

- 1 Samuel 8.10-17.

¹⁰ Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹² Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶ Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. (NIV).

The Promise (2 Samuel 7).

Despite the warnings, the Israelites press on in their bid to replace God as king.

And God buckles to their request.

He allows them to take on kingship.

He even takes it into account in his plan for their future.

He incorporates it in his covenant relationship with his people.

This is spelt out in 2 Samuel 7.

In 2 Samuel 7 God reiterates the Abrahamic promises.

He promises that the promises given to Abraham will be fulfilled through David and his descendants.

He will make David's name great (verse 9).

He will provide a place for the people of God (verse 10).

He will give them rest from their enemies (verse 11).

Moreover, God will raise up an offspring to David whose throne and kingdom will be established forever.

God will be Father to this king, and he shall be God's son.

This is the promise made to David and all the people of God.

2 Samuel 7.9ff.

⁸ “Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹¹ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. .

*“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. ¹⁵ But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’”
(NIV).*

The reality (2 Samuel 8-20).

But if this is the promise then the reality is a different story.

Chapters 8-20, and indeed the whole of the books of Samuel bring us from the promise to the reality.

True, God does make David’s name great among the nations.

True, God does establish a ‘place’ for his people that fulfils the promises made to Abraham.

True, God does eventually give them peace from their enemies.

These chapters make this clear.

But these chapters make another point abundantly clear also.

The point they make is that David's Kingship is far from ideal.

David the King is far from being an ideal ruler who rules in a godlike fashion.

On the contrary the examples are deliberately heaped upon each other of how David failed.

This is the man who tricks a priest of God into believing that he is on urgent royal business so that the priest can provide him with consecrated bread and a sword (1 Samuel 21.1-9).

This piece of deception alone costs the lives of 85 priests and their families (1 Samuel 22.11-19).

This David is the man whose military campaigns include some barbarities of the highest order.

This is the man who sleeps with the wife of one of his most loyal soldiers and then murders him so that he won't be found out.

The man who is a singularly bad father.

And unforgiving tyrant.

The David we meet in scripture is a flawed human being.

The point is clear.

God has an ideal, revealed in his promise.

Reality is far from the ideal.

What hope have we got?

And if we were really honest, we shouldn't be surprised, should we?

The rest of the Bible should have led us to expect it.

Genesis 1-3 tells us what human beings are like..rotten to the core.

Unable to meet up with the standards God sets.

Frail in the face of God's expectations.

And David is a human being like us.

Frail, sinful, unable to meet God's expectations.

And so the question is, 'Where do we go from here?'

Why is the promise never really reached?

How do we bridge the gap between God's promise and cold hard reality?

2 Samuel 21-24 attempts to do this.

And it attempts to do this by giving a theological explanation of the whole book.

Lets have a look at it.

Tying it all together.

The first thing I want you to notice is that there are three pairs of stories in the four chapters.

These chapters are not just appendices - they are well ordered and structured.

They represent a summary of the book.

Notice that the first and the last passages treat the same theme.

They look at one side of kingship.

They use some examples from the lives of both Saul and David to show just what real kings are like.

Real kings act in their own interests.

Real kings act with their own political futures in mind.

Real kings have their own agendas.

These agendas often bring cruel and unjust results.

These agendas often bring down the just judgment of God upon the whole people of God.

The realities of Kingship: Saul (21.1-14).

Take King Saul as an example.

In 2 Samuel 21.1-14 we are told of how Saul did certain things which were really in his own political interests.

Look at 2 Samuel 21:1

During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

The Gibeonites had a centuries old nonaggression treaty that had been established before God with these people.

Verse 2 tells us that Saul was zealous for Israel and Judah.

It appears as though he wanted to get rid of the troublesome presence of these non-Israelites.

And so he engaged in an attempt at genocide.

And in doing so he brought down the judgment of God.

And that judgment needs to be atoned for.

And the atonement would cost even more lives as David sought to make up for it.

This is the reality of kingship.

Kings do their own thing, their own way, without God.

Kings are tyrants.

The realities of Kingship: David (24.1-25).

But King David is not much better.

In 2 Samuel 24 King David takes a census.

He does this in order to work out how powerful he is and how he needs to order his country.

In other words, he does so for his own political interests.

And in so doing he brings down the judgment of God upon the people of God.

And that judgment needs to be atoned for.

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Successful warrior kings: David's wars against the Philistines (21.15-22).

Successful warrior kings: David's fighting men (23.8-39).

Of course there is the other side of the story also.

Kings can be successful warriors.

They can do what Israel wanted of a King.

They can defeat the enemies of Israel and win great battles.

For example, read the passages of 21.15-22 and 23.8-39.

Of course, to do this they have to take sons from the people of Israel.

Of course, they will also need to employ foreign mercenaries to fight their wars.

These are the realities of kingship - self seeking, less than ideal kings.

Kings whose motives are more often survival and empire than righteousness, justice and salvation.

Kings whose battles are won at a cost.

These are the realities of kingship.

This is life as it is.

Enigmatic middle passages: (22.1-51 and 23.1-7).

And then we come to the enigmatic middle passages – to 22.1-51 and 23.1-7.

Somehow when we read it we can't believe it.

The David we meet here is not the David we were introduced to in 2 Samuel 9-20.

There is nothing of the flawed character that was David who ruled Israel in the early tenth century BC.

The David here is righteous.

He is blameless in the execution of his kingly duties.

Listen to 22.21-24:

²¹ “The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. ²² For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. ²³ All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. ²⁴ I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. (NIV).

Or listen to 23.3-5.

Here David rejoices in the ‘everlasting covenant’ which God has made with him and his house (23.3-5).

³ The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: ‘When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, ⁴ he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.’ ⁵ “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? (NIV).

Can you see what these passages are about?

These passages are not so much the daily life of David.

2 Samuel 9-20, 21.1-14 and 24.1-25 have shown us that.

These passages represent the hope of David and the hope of all Israel.

A hope for a righteous king who would always and consistently do what David did at one or two points in his short life.

This is the promise and the ideal to which David and Israel all look.

This is life as it should be.

The contrast is profound isn't it?

One set of passages setting out the reality.

Setting out life as it is.

Another setting out the promises.

Setting out life as it should be.

And we find ourselves asking, 'Will the promises ever match reality?'

The message of these chapters 22 and 23.1-7 is clear.

It is a clear, resounding 'Yes!'

For the promise does not rest on human performance.

The passages are clear - it rest on divine grace.

It rests on a God who acts.

This runs throughout the psalm of chapter 22.

It climaxes in verse 51:

⁵¹He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever.

Or in verse 5 of chapter 23:

⁵"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?

In the end, David is not reliant on his own goodness.

He depends on God who will act in grace to reinstate the one to whom the promises were made.

It is this and this alone that helps us out.

The guts of Gods promises:.

This is the guts of all the promises of God.

The reality of God.

The reality of Grace.

The reality of God's intervention.

This alone imparts life and meaning and future to the promises and the ideal painted - despite the reality.

That is what these passages are saying.

God is here.

God is sovereign.

You can have hope in him, even if you can't trust a David.

He will bring about the promises he has made to David and to all Israel.

And he will do this despite David, despite human frailty, despite human sin.

And 3000 years latter we know that he did.

He fulfilled them in Jesus.

In Jesus the son of David.

Jesus the son of God.

Jesus the shepherd of Israel.

Jesus fulfils this promise to David and his descendants.

Jesus fulfils all the promises of God.

He is God's 'Yes!' and 'Amen!' to all the promises of God.

What hope have we got?

What I would like to do now is to let you into my mind and feelings for a bit.

I'm going to do that because I presume that you are like me.

That the things that go on inside me go on inside you too.

The point is that I often feel the same tension the writer of the book of Samuel felt.

I often feel the same tensions that I think he felt his original readership felt.

I often look at the promises of God and then back to the reality of life and ask myself -
What hope have I got?

Let me explain.

I want to explain by looking firstly at the goals God has for me as his person.

The ideals he sets for us.

In other words, I want to look at life as it should be.

Secondly I want to look at the reality of life as a Christian.

In other words, life as it is.

As I do this I'll be selective.

Again you will have to bear with me.

God's goal for me

The way I would like to do this is to paint for you a picture of the truly godly person.

All the language and expressions are drawn from the New Testament.

The true godly person in the New Testament is like this.

They always have the best interests of others in mind.

They love others as they love themselves.

They have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, envy, greed, drunkenness and the like.

They are characterised by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

They don't let any unwholesome word come out of their mouths, but only those things which are helpful for building others up, according to their needs.

They had rid themselves of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Instead of this they are kind and compassionate to each other, forgiving each other, just as they have been forgiven in Christ.

They treat each other with respect and as equals in Christ. They don't rule it over others for their own good.

As children, they obey their parents.

Their minds dwell on the things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

They are keen to learn from God and practice what they learn.

They have thrown aside all sinful habits and practice righteousness.

They don't let sin reign in their bodies, nor do they obey its evil desires.

Rather, they offer themselves to God to use the parts of their body righteously.

They live in prayerful dependence upon God.

Always faithful.

Always obedient.

The reality.

Now let me talk to you about reality.

In the real world in which I live things are not that easy.

I am all too aware of what God demands of me and of the ideal presented above.

And yet, when I am truthful with myself I'm just like David - I don't live up to God's expectations.

I do not always have the best interests of others in mind.

I often don't look out for others as I look out for myself.

Although I don't have difficulty with all of the 'lusts of the flesh' I listed above, I do have problems with some.

The fruit of the Spirit are not always the things that characterise my relationship with God and others.

The words that issue from my mouth are certainly not always gracious, seasoned as it were with salt.

I have spoken words that have destroyed rather than built up.

I get angry with my wife and children, with students and staff and forgiveness and compassion are not always high on my agenda.

Oh, I do have moments when I do the sorts of things that I should do as a Christian, but they are far from as often as I would like.

I am not at all as consistent as I would like to be.

I know the ideal.

I desire to be like the ideal.

But it doesn't always work out that way.

More often than not sin dominates me and seems to overtake me.

It still seems to exercise more rule over me than the ideal would indicate that it should.

Yes, for me too, the reality doesn't seem to meet the ideal.

I'm just like all human beings.

I'm just like David.

Caught in the same bind as he is.

And I cry out to God.

What can I do?

What hope have I got?

Can reality ever meet the ideal?

Can life ever be as it should be?

Can I ever be rescued from the bind that I find myself in?

Will sin, failure and human frailty always be my master?

The guarantee.

And the words of 2 Samuel speak to me.

They say,

‘Yes.’

‘If you leave David as David the man without God.’

‘If you leave God out of the picture.’

‘Then all hope is gone.’

‘David will be left carving out his own kingdom.’

‘He will be left stealing people’s wives and murdering innocent men.’

‘And the same goes for you...’

‘If you leave yourself as yourself the human being.’

‘If you leave God out of the picture.’

‘Then you don’t stand a chance.’

‘You will be left in your sin.’

But 2 Samuel doesn’t leave us there.

It reminds us that there is a God who is sovereign.

There is a God who is active.

There is a God who intervenes on behalf of his chosen king.

There is a God who intervenes on behalf of his people.

His intervention is the guarantee that God’s promises will not be overtaken by human frailty.

His grace is the promise that the ideal will survive.

That life as it should be will triumph over life as it is.

He is a sovereign God.

He is almighty to save.

He is God.

But how can I know for sure?

But there is still a question, isn't there?

The question is...

How do I know?

How do I know God will intervene?

As inheritors of the New Testament we know for certain.

For God has already acted.

He has already intervened.

He has already fulfilled the promises given to David in 2 Samuel.

He has already fulfilled so many of the other promises of the Old Testament.

And he is the guarantee that God will continue to act.

That God will continue to intervene on behalf of his people.

In effect, in Jesus God is saying.

Do not be daunted by the reality.

Do not be afraid.

Trust the promises.

You can trust the promises.

In Jesus all the promises are 'Yes!' and 'Amen!.'

Do you believe in Jesus?

Well he is God's ringing 'Yes!'.

A resounding, clanging, earthshattering 'Amen!' to all the promises of God.

God's iron clad guarantee that he can be trusted to fulfill his promises.

That the ideal will be met.

That he is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

That life as it should be will overtake life as it is.

We will be saved.

We can be right with God.

Righteousness will flourish.

Wisdom will be given to you.

The meek shall inherit the earth.

Our work in the Lord will be seen to have not been in vain.

We will see the fruit of our labour in and for the Lord.

We will see that the word of God we have spoken has borne fruit as God promised it would.

God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

Swords will be beaten into ploughshares.

The lamb shall lie down with the lamb.

God shall rule the nations with an iron rod.

He shall punish the wicked.

Christ will come again.

We shall be changed.

We will be like him.

God will transform your lowly body to be like the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

All these promises are made by God.

And there are many more like them.

And God assures us his intervention in Christ is the guarantee that God's promises will not be overtaken by human frailty.

He tells us that Jesus is our hope.

He is the assurance that our reality will be overcome by God's promises.

Friends, there is no more fitting place to end this weekend together.

At the centre of life and ministry stands the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is God's final word.

He is the heir of all things.

He is the one through whom God made the universe.

He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

He sustains all things by his powerful word.

He has provided purification of sins.

And he sits now at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

In him all the promises of God are 'Yes. Yes. And Yes!'

In the words of 2 Corinthians 1:20f.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. ²¹ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.