

“The Coronation of Solomon”
1 Kings 1:1 – 2:46

Sunset . . . the time of day when activities begin to wind down, home becomes the refuge from the cares of the world, and it's time for rest. David was in the sunset of his life as we begin the book of 1 Kings, but the cares of his kingdom would still demand his attention. Physically he needed care. He was 70 years old, worn out from a lifetime of being a warrior; had poor circulation and was bed-ridden. Maybe a beautiful young woman in his bed would put some sparkle back in his eyes or at least she could keep him warm. So Abishag, a Shunammite, came to wait on the king. Her beauty did not go unnoticed by others in the royal household.

We have three things to focus on as a change of succession was at hand:

- 1) How insurrection sought the throne
- 2) How intrigue saved the throne
- 3) How intercession secured the throne

How insurrection sought the throne . . .

David was dying . . . who would be the next king? Perhaps the matter was clear in David's mind because his lifelong desire was to build a temple for the Lord. But God had said to him,

“Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.” (1 Chronicles 28:6). Common knowledge may have been one thing, but perhaps it wasn’t yet “in writing” so to speak. So, Adonijah, the oldest of David’s living sons, thought to his mind that he should be the logical heir to the throne. It’s a timely reminder to all of us of the importance of having a last will and making your wishes known in advance and in writing.

With his father’s health rapidly declining, what better time to advance his claim to the throne than by gathering supporters and declaring himself king? After all, according to verse 6, his father had never interfered with him by asking, “Why do you behave as you do?” Do you get a picture of perhaps a rich, handsome, spoiled prince who felt entitled to take whatever he wanted?

A true insurrection implies organized effort and Adonijah delivers. Off he went to El Rogel with Joab, head of David’s army, (military support) and Abiathar (priestly support) along with his other brothers and royal officials to make sacrifices, have a feast and declare himself king. Of course, the youngest brother, Solomon, was not invited. Just as he’d had to deal with the insurrection of Absalom, once again David would have to deal

with another rebellious son and other traitors to God's will.

Meanwhile, back in the palace . . .

How intrigue saved the throne . . .

If ever King David had a loyal friend and adviser, it was the prophet Nathan. Nathan brought the good news about God's covenant with David and his descendants (2 Samuel 7), and Nathan shepherded David through those dark days after the king's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). Nathan must have had musical gifts as well because he helped David organize worship in the sanctuary (2 Chronicles 29:25-26). When Solomon was born, Nathan told the parents that the Lord wanted the boy also named "Jedidiah – beloved of the Lord" (2 Samuel 12). Also, it's possible that Nathan was the tutor to young Solomon. So when Nathan heard about Adonijah's feast and his claim to the throne, he immediately went to work.

When you hear something once it doesn't necessarily impress you, but when you hear it twice (and from reliable sources) you sit up and take notice. That was Nathan's plan.

First, enlist the help of the king's wife, Bathsheba, because she stood to perhaps lose her life and that of her son if Adonijah's claim to the throne was upheld. Nathan's advice was for her to go to King David, advise him of Adonijah's actions and the fact

that Joab and Abiathar supported this, and then ask him to formally declare who would be the king to succeed him – all with a gentle reminder that “the eyes of Israel are on you” (in other words, “You’re not dead yet.”) And also a reminder of what would happen to her and her son if he did not take action.

Second, Nathan would come and confirm the facts that Bathsheba had presented adding that those loyal to David had not been invited to the feast – namely, himself, Zakok the priest, Benaiah, head of the bodyguards, and, of course, Solomon. Then asking in verse 27, “Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?”

Up to now David had no clue what was happening. News of the insurrection rouses David and most likely he was furious at Adonijah and those who supported him. You can almost hear his warrior voice come back as he said, “Call in Bathsheba.” This matter was going to be settled here and now. Verse 29 - The king then took an oath: “As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place.”

Nathan's plan had worked. When we think of intrigue we often think of a plot or a furtive scheme someone uses to get their own way. But Nathan's scheme wasn't self-serving, it was to prompt David to take action before it was too late.

Come to think of it, isn't that what we Christians do also? We invite people to church; we serve our community; we engage in many activities hoping others will see our good works and be intrigued by our efforts to serve God. We want to win them to Jesus . . . we want them to take action before it's too late. Our motive isn't to receive a soul-winner's crown for our glory, but to fortify the Kingdom of God here on earth until Jesus comes again to rule and reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Wasting no time, David called for Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, his faithful commander of the guard. They were to take Solomon, set him on the king's mule, take him to Gihon and anoint him king over Israel with the blowing of trumpets. This wasn't going to be a secret affair – everyone would shout, "Long live King Solomon!"

There are several things to look at as this event took place. David asked them to put Solomon on his mule. For Israelites riding a mule had significance. In that culture, riding a mule

symbolized peace and royalty. In contrast, riding a horse indicated war.

Jesus also rode a mule when He rode to Jerusalem to offer Himself to Jerusalem as their king. The mule signified that He came as king in peace. The Bible says the next time Jesus comes He will ride a white horse. This too is symbolic. He will not be returning as Savior, but as Judge to make war on Satan.

Gihon was an important place of springs on the eastern slope of mount Zion less than a mile up the valley north from En Rogel where Adonijah was hosting his great feast. Zadok and Nathan were to anoint Solomon with the holy anointing oil from the tabernacle which would in effect make him a co-regent sharing the throne with David. The trumpets would be blown to declare to the people that this was an official event.

Benaiah was actually the son of a priest according to 1 Chronicles 27:5, but he chose a military career and became one of David's mighty men. Enthusiastically, both he and the troops he commanded supported both David and Solomon with loyal service.

The coronation was complete and the people were ecstatic as they played their musical instruments and rejoiced shouting "Long live King Solomon!" Verse 40 says "the ground shook with

the sound.” But that wasn’t all that would shake in the days to come.

How intercession secured the throne . . .

When we think of intercession it’s usually in the context of prayer for another’s needs. Or we think of Jesus interceding for us before the Father, being a mediator, against the accusations that Satan brings against us. But in today’s lesson I think we can apply it to the situation of Solomon being an intercessor for David to assure that his heritage would continue as God had promised. Enemies needed to be dealt with.

Let’s begin with Adonijah. It didn’t take long before the news of Solomon’s coronation reached the ears of Adonijah. Moreover, it was reported to him by Jonathan, son of the priest Abiathar, that Solomon sat on the throne and that King David had bowed in worship on his bed and acknowledged that his eyes had seen his successor. How quickly Adonijah’s supporters melted away at this bad news. The guests, including the naïve princes, all rose up and fled back to the city for safety, and Adonijah fled to the tabernacle for asylum.

This was a tent in Jerusalem, which housed the ark (1 Chron. 16:1). The tabernacle with the other furnishings was at Gibeon. For those of you who may not be familiar with the altar,

it was square with four horns on each corner. The priests would smear the blood of the slain offering on these horns as a testimony to the lasting worth of the blood. At that time, a guilty Israelite could lay hold of the horns when he sought refuge. But he experienced deliverance only when he came with a pure heart, with confession of his trespass, and with faith.

Adonijah took hold of the horns of the altar, which could at least delay judgment and give the accused an opportunity for a hearing. But it's clear that he came not with a changed heart or repentance, but out of fear of retribution.

Solomon showed mercy to his brother and allowed him to return to his home in Jerusalem. This amounted to house arrest because the king's guard could keep Adonijah under constant surveillance. Solomon also warned his brother to be careful of how he behaved. If he stepped out of line he'd be executed. Adonijah bowed his body before Solomon, but his heart was submitted neither to the Lord nor his brother.

Chapter 2 begins "When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son."

Be strong, show yourself to be a man –

Observe what the Lord your God requires –

Walk in His ways –

Solomon was a young man who had lived a sheltered life, so he needed this admonition. In fact, from the very outset of his reign he would have to make some tough decisions and issue some difficult orders. The king was expected to be familiar with the law and the covenant (Deut. 17:14-20), for in obeying God's Word he would find his wisdom, strength and blessing. But there was added responsibility. "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel." David knew that Israel had a ministry to perform in providing the vehicle for the promised Redeemer to come to earth, and the future of God's redemptive plan rested with Israel.

We should also take note of what David said in 1 Chronicles 28:9 – "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches the heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you: but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever."

I want to focus in on the phrase ". . . acknowledge the God of your father . . ." so we notice that he did not say to know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. David's God was personal to him and he wanted Solomon to have that same relationship. Isn't

that what we want to pass on to our children? Don't we want them to know that we have a personal relationship with the Almighty God, the Creator and how deep our desire is for them to have that too? If only it could be inherited, but we know that each person has to make that decision for himself.

So to sum up David's advice: Personally, be a man. Spiritually, know God. Morally, walk in His ways. That's good advice even today; and, as with any advice, it's usually more caught than taught. We emulate what we see, what we admire. To pass it on, we need to live it now.

David knew that Solomon was going to inherit problems that would have to be dealt with if his position as king were to be solidified. So he spoke his mind about Joab and Shimei with a kind word about his friend Barzillai of Gilead. Having said his piece, the king of 40 years rested with his fathers. The sun had set on the life of David, "a man after God's own heart."

It was now the sunrise of a new king's era. His agenda was set: deal with Joab and Shimei, reward the sons of Barzillai, and build the temple. But his first major crisis came from his half-brother Adonijah.

Commentators vary as to their opinion as to Bathsheba's part in bringing Adonijah's request to Solomon that he be allowed

to marry Abishag, the Shunammite. Remember she was the beautiful woman brought to David's bed. Some think Bathsheba was just naïve. Others think she was very aware that Adonijah was plotting to try and be co-regent with Solomon. After all, it was common knowledge that possession of a king's wife or concubine was evidence of possession of the kingdom. That's why Absalom had publically taken David's concubines on the roof when he was trying to usurp the kingdom from David. She probably knew her request would certainly set Solomon to action to get rid of this threat.

Solomon immediately detected the reason behind the request and said, (vs. 22) "you might as well request the kingdom for him . . .and for Abithar and Joab." Solomon knew full well that those three were still united in gaining control of the kingdom. By asking for Abishag, Adonijah had signed his death warrant, and Benaiah went and took the traitor's life.

But Solomon didn't stop there: he also sent Abiathar the priest into retirement at the priestly city of Anathoth, about three miles from Jerusalem. Remember this was the home of Jeremiah the prophet. In deposing Abiathar, Solomon fulfilled the prophecy given to Eli that his family would not continue in the priesthood (1 Samuel 2:27-36). Zadok was made high priest and

his descendants filled the office until 171 B.C. Solomon recognized the fact that Abiathar had faithfully served his father David, so he didn't have him executed.

No doubt Joab had an efficient spy system, and when he heard the news that Adonijah had been slain, he knew he was next on the list. So he fled for asylum to the tent of the Lord just as Adonijah had done and clung to the horns of the altar. Joab refused the requests of both Benaiah and Solomon to come out of the sacred enclosure, but Solomon was not to be treated in such an arrogant manner by a man who was obviously a traitor and a murderer. Remember he had slain both Abner, commander of Israel's army, and Amasa, commander of Judah's army – both men Solomon deemed "more upright" than Joab.

Though he was a soldier, Benaiah belonged to a priestly family, so it was legal for him to enter the sacred precincts which he did and killed Joab at the altar and then buried him. This wasn't just a revenge killing; Solomon explained that the death of Joab took away the stain of the innocent blood from the land. Numbers 35:33 says, "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it." Murderers like Joab were not to be given

any mercy but were to be executed. David didn't execute Joab, even after Joab killed Absalom, because David knew that he himself had blood on his hands. He was guilty of asking Joab to shed Uriah's innocent blood, but Solomon's hands were clean. He ordered the execution. Saul's treatment of the Gibeonites in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 had polluted the land and created trouble for David, and Solomon didn't want that to happen during his reign.

Verse 35 says, "The king put Benaniah son of Jehoiada over the army in Joab's position and replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest." Loyalty was rewarded.

The events that end the life of the man Shimei close out our lesson for this week. I'd like us to think back to the story of Shimei and David. In a nutshell, Shimei was related to Saul and cursed or criticized David for taking over Saul's kingdom while David was fleeing from Absalom even throwing dirt and rocks at him. But rather than having him struck down, David considered that this rebuke might be from the Lord and said in 2 Samuel 16:12, "It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."

Perhaps there is something we can learn from this event. I think there are four things we need to consider for ourselves when someone criticizes us:

1. It usually comes when it's least deserved.
2. It usually comes when we least need it.
3. It usually comes from those least qualified to give it.
4. It usually comes in a form least helpful to us.

Throwing rocks, especially verbal ones, may make some feel more justified to themselves, but being the target shouldn't deflate us to the point of giving up. Being human, we're all distressed when criticized, but maybe it is something we need to hear. As they say, "consider the source." If you need to take action, take it; if it's unjustified, ignore it.

David had chosen not to respond, not to put Shemei to the sword, but his words to Solomon removed that personal protection. 1 Kings 2:9 "But now, do not consider him (Shemei) innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood."

Certainly Shemei was a potential troublemaker for Solomon. Being from the tribe of Benjamin he might rouse the tribe against the new king or even stir up the ten northern tribes of Israel. So Solomon, heeding his father's advice, ordered Shemei to move to Jerusalem, build himself a house, and stay in the city. If he left the city and crossed the Kidron Valley, he would die. Solomon's

men could keep an eye on him since Jerusalem wasn't that large a city at that time.

All went well for three years until two of Shemei's slaves ran away twenty-five miles to Gath. He could have sent somebody else to go retrieve the slaves, but for some reason he decided to go himself. Bad decision.

Solomon found out that he'd left Jerusalem and when he returned, he was called before the king. "Didn't I make you swear by the Lord and warn you, on the day you leave to go anywhere else, you can be sure you will die? At that time you said to me, 'What you say is good. I will obey.' Why then did you not keep your oath to the Lord and obey the command I gave you?" The king also said to Shemei, "You know in your heart all the wrong you did to my father David. Now the Lord will repay you for your wrongdoing. But King Solomon will be blessed, and David's throne will remain secure before the Lord forever."

With that, Benaiah struck Shimeï the traitor down and killed him.

Solomon began his reign ordering three executions, interceding for the house of David to remove the threats to the throne. In 1 Chronicles 22: 9, David had told Solomon that the Lord said, "You will have a son who will be a man of peace and

rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign.” True peace must be based on righteousness, not on sentiment. Solomon was indeed a ‘man of peace,’ and he had achieved that piece by bringing about righteousness in the land. The throne was now secure. The sun was rising on Solomon’s brilliant achievements . . . and so begins the chronicle of the last monarch of the United Kingdom.

Let’s pray.