

Sermon 1: 1 Kings 1:1-10: The Self-exaltation of Adonijah

OUTLINE

David's decline
Adonijah's exaltation

INTRODUCTION

Kingmaking, self-enthronement, pride, self-exaltation, these are the sins that meet us as we begin the book of 1 Kings moving from the reign of David to the reign of Solomon. We are at a crucial point in salvation history. David becoming King has fulfilled an important prophecy given to Judah by Jacob, and is giving substance to the longed for deliverer promised from the foundation of the earth—the seed of the woman promised in Gen. 3:15. Just after the fall of mankind into sin God promised a deliverer who would destroy satan and his works. With David having become king and subdued the Philistines and other enemies, the stage seems set for the arrival of the promised one. A golden age where a permanent temple will be built and God will dwell with His people forever. The sad truth is that the whole books of 1 and 2 Kings are a parade of sinful men who only increase our desire for the true King who will rule and bring in God's kingdom of peace and sinlessness. The period of kings ends not with God restoring the fellowship of Eden but a repeat of Eden as Israel is exiled from the land. The history of the kings is a sad testimony to the impotence of man to be holy, to rule God's world as His vice regents.

The book of 1 kings covers 400 years. Many might think the book boring and tedious but it is very succinct account given the time that it covers. And the issues it covers are those of supreme importance, there is no wasted information like what clogs up so many history textbooks. The first half of the book details the rise and reign of Solomon. We have chosen to continue on from the life of David to Solomon, not merely to get closure and watch David die, but because the life of Solomon is so important for us today. He was a man of the world, full of wisdom, but weak, and fell prey to the very modern sins of money, sex and power. We hope to gain many lessons from his life.

Today we begin with the pride of Adonijah. We will look at the opening ten verses in two parts looking at David's decline and Adonijah's exaltation.

David's decline

The scene is set for us in the opening 5 verses with the declining state of King David, v1, 'Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm.' Sharks follow blood in the water, lions when hunting instinctively fix on the vulnerable and sick, so Adonijah senses his opportunity to seize the throne because David is in decline. We are told he is old, and we see that he is unable to stay warm. So much so that they hold a nation wide beauty contest to get a new concubine to try and get his blood flowing to reinvigorate the old king.

David is not presented in an overly positive light in this portion. We see that he is apathetic when it comes to a succession plan. He knew that Solomon was to be king but made no move to install him. We see that he was ignorant of Adonijah's coup and had to be informed, this shows that he is not keeping up with important events in his own court. And we see in v6 that there is a history of bad parenting. And now this man who was once a mighty warrior and had done so much was also fading physically.

Let me speak about a theme that will necessarily have to come up over and over again in this book, the sufficiency of Christ and the deficiency of all other kings and saviours. 'On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.' David as remarkable man that he was, and he was most remarkable, was merely a man. He slew lions, and bears and giants. He settled Israel in the land and subdued all her enemies. He was a man of heart and a man of action. He wrote the songbook for Israel, gaining the highest honour as being called a man after God's own heart. Yet he is merely a man. He is full of sin and failings. We see that most obviously in his adultery with Bathsheba. Here we see the best of men, being man at best, and all flesh is as grass, burned up in a moment. Compare David then with the Son of David, Jesus Christ. Sinful where Jesus is sinless, and here we see David on the brink of death going into a tomb and whose body is still there to this day, but Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. He did not merely resurrect from death but broke through the door of death on the way out that it can never keep us who are His.

Presidents and Prime ministers will never be able to secure the perfect future your heart longs for. Husbands, wives, children and grandchildren will not be able to fill the sad places of our hearts and eradicate the pain of sin in this life. Possessions, accomplishments, accolades, nor anything or anyone created can be the one who satisfies our hearts and fix our world. Like David all our saviours fade away. There is only one who has proved His worth by overcoming death who can satisfy our hearts and fix our world.

We must say a few words about David's parenting of Adonijah before we view the Adonijah himself, 1:6, 'His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?"' There is a repeating pattern here in David's life. When Amnon raped his sister David was passive and did nothing to him, this provoked Absalom to take matters into his own hands and murder him. It appears that this was not only the case with Amnon but all David's children. The text points out that the key thing that was missing was not verbal praise, physical presence or material possessions and opportunity, but the absence of discipline. David appears to be weaker than Eli in this area who at least verbally rebuked his sons who were abusing their office as priests to extort meat from the worshippers and who slept with the women working in the temple, though Eli did not remove them from office as he should have. No, David did not want to even confront, question and rebuke his son when he was wrong. Perhaps it was these exact examples in mind that Solomon gives instruction about discipline, Prov. 13:24, 'Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.' David may have loved his son, but it did not take the form that his son needed, and that was discipline.

The text records the traditional question that a parent asks whenever a child does something wrong, 'Why?' This is a great place to begin all discipline, firstly, it starts a conversation that seeks to get at the heart of the problem and does not rush into punishment, and it gives an opportunity to teach. When we ask our children why, it is not long before we get the 'I don't know' answer. It is then that we remind them of their sinful hearts that are naturally sinful, how if they are not Christians they must seek salvation in Christ, and if they are Christians, they ask for forgiveness as for God's help to enable them to put that sin to death in their lives. The question why should not be left as a rhetorical question but an inroad into bringing the truth of the gospel to bear upon the hearts of our children.

But this is not only a text of warning to parents, children are encouraged by this verse to view a parent who questions them on their behaviour as an act of love not interference. A child should never have the attitude that it is none of the parent's business what they do.

We are taught here by implication that this is exactly a parents business and job to pursue such matters.

Adonijah's exaltation

We turn now from the father to the son. 1:5, 'Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.' Who is Adonijah? He is the fourth eldest of David's sons. Amnon the firstborn is dead, Absalom the thirdborn is dead, Chileab the second born is not mentioned so is suspected to have died in childhood. Adonijah was fourth in line for the throne. Solomon was the tenth son. We are told in verse 6 that he was Absalom's brother. The fact that he is a good looking young man should remind you of Saul, Absalom and Eliab, and the worldly way in which outward attraction and not godliness is seen to fit someone for leadership.

Now take the words, 'I will be king' and meditate on them. These are the words of Adonijah's pride. On the one hand they may appear very reasonable for is Adonijah not the next eldest son who is in line to become king? The answer is no. David had already gone on record by oath stating that Solomon would be king, 1 kings 1:13, 17. Adonijah was following the worldly way of primogeniture, the eldest taking over power, but God's ways are not our ways. David had already been chosen over Jonathan who was the next entitled to the throne of Israel after Saul. Adonijah shows his sinfulness by following the ways of man and not the ways of God in taking the throne for himself.

The notion of 'I will be king' was the heart of satan when he sought to dethrone God and rule the universe, and it was the pride with which Adam and Eve were tempted with. This sin of pride, of self-exaltation, or playing God, is the mother of all sins. No law of God can be broken without one first deciding to ignore God as king and take that prerogative to rule upon yourself. Your will, your laws, your desires, your way. Adonijah is an illustration of the sin that rejects God in our lives. Think on how reasonable sin can appear, just like Adonijah's attempt to take the throne appears. Justice seems to be on his side, precedent seems to be on his side, he even has the support of influential people to back him up.

Isn't this how we promote sin today, it is ok to commit adultery when I am unhappily married to an angry man or an unaffectionate woman; it is ok to pursue a homosexual marriage because it is my human right to be married and happy as I see fit; it is ok to get drunk because so and so thinks it is ok. Sin is such a terrible thing not because it is unpopular, quite the opposite, sin often looks legitimate. The evil of sin is the denial of God as God in our lives. To deny God His right to rule us is to pretend He does not exist. To deny His law our obedience is to act as if He has no right to expect our obedience. To do your will, your law, your way, is to be god. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot pretend that He is not God and is not qualified to rule you by virtue of making you and having the most perfect and just way for us to live. To allow our worship and obedience to be given to another is asking God to approve of evil for only His ways for us are perfect and just. To expect God to allow us to self-rule is like asking the president of a country to allow for everyone to be president, or babies to parent themselves, or allow a blind person to lead themselves through a mine field. All of who He is cannot permit it. His love cannot permit for He seeks our highest good which is found in doing what He made us to do. His justice cannot permit it for it is wrong that we deny truth and make up our own laws defined by selfish desires. His truthfulness cannot pretend that He is not God, that His law is not the best way, and that rejection of Him is not the worst possible thing that any created thing

can ever do. Our greatest crimes are those committed against God not man, because God is the greatest being.

Like Adonijah you can either accept that King that God provides, the Son of David of His choosing and giving, namely, Christ. Or you can decide 'I will be king.' These are the only choices, to not choose is to say I reject that Jesus is my King; to choose another as your king is to reject Jesus as your king.

Are you here today as an Adonijah, a self-made king? If you turn God will save you. Adonijah reminds us of the prodigal son. Adonijah could not wait for his father to die and wanted the world now! The prodigal son committed the greatest disrespect by not waiting for his father to die to receive his inheritance but demanded it before his father died. The prodigal went off to be the king of his own kingdom and found himself in ruin, his royal treasury had run dry and his faithful citizens had abandoned him when the money run out. He was reduced to poverty and shame. But when he decided to admit his sin and return to his father, his father received him with open arms, gifts and a feast of celebration. God does not receive us so willingly because our sins are so small, and our rebellion against Him a small thing to overcome. No, He is ready to receive us because the huge price that needed paying for your offenses was so perfectly paid by the death of Jesus, and His love for us is so great in providing full atonement for our rebellion.

Notice the other aspects of Adonijah's rebellion. Firstly notice his publicity campaign. 'And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.' Imagine it! You are a citizen of Jerusalem and you are in your house and you hear the sound of 50 men in armour doing a double time quick march outside in the street. You and your neighbours attention is grabbed and you all rush to your windows and doors. Then come the chariots, and children are lining the street for the parade, and then come the horsemen like a bodyguard, and then finally out comes Adonijah. What will you think? Rebellion walks brazenly down the main street strutting its stuff with all the trappings of social acceptability and appointment.

Secondly, notice the endorsements that Adonijah gets. He is not the only one who thinks in a worldly way who rejects God's ways. V7, 'He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him.' Joab was a disgraced general who probably wanted to retain a position of leadership in the Military. Abiathar was a priest, but not the high priest who was probably hoping for a promotion. These self-interested individuals were either driven by a pragmatists view of what they thought the nation needed, or a baser motive of self-promotion. Either way, sin always finds its happy supporters, it is godliness, and God's ways that are alien and criticised.

Thirdly, notice the backhanded way in which Adonijah conducted himself, notice who he left out of the loop being secretive towards certain important people, v8, 'But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah.' The high priest, the main prophet of the nation who speaks truth to kings, nor the kings personal body guard. We see in v9 that everyone else is invited to the crowning banquet, but that these and Solomon, v10 are excluded. Two things are seen here, firstly the way in which godliness is marginalised. But there is a reminder here too of the secretive nature of sin. When we sin we do it in the dark, we don't tell our elders, our spouses, even our closest friends, we keep our sin in the dark. There it has freedom to grow.

Adonijah illustrates the nature of our self-enthroning hearts and shows us that we are rebels who reject God's king and we do this through various tactics that Adonijah employed. We think in worldly ways which seem to legitimise our purpose; we brazenly employ open demonstrations of publicity to normalise our activity; we seek out likeminded people who support our agenda and empower us; and we exclude the godly who are not part of our selfish agenda and secretively grow our sins. Repentance and submission to Christ is the only way we must respond.