



Back in the first or second week of this series, I accidentally spoiled the ending of David's life when I mentioned that eventually, he dies. Today, as we draw the series to a close, I'm giving you another spoiler: Like David, you and I will one day die. I realize, technically, that's probably not shocking news and I'm not spoiling anything. But on the other hand, as Ernest Becker titled his 1972 book, "The Denial of Death": we all tend to do exactly that. Denying the inevitable is not necessarily intentional; it's just that we don't think about our own deaths much, probably because trying to get our minds around our own earthly nonexistence is hard to do.

My guess, however, is that we would all like to "die well" – meaning, die with hope for what's on the other side, die with a sense of a "job well done" in this life, die with a sense of leaving a positive legacy and positively impacting the people in our lives, and so forth. And in today's passage, we see in David a model of how to die well. We are in 1 Kings 2:1-11 this morning. We will begin with the **first 4 verses**, and then continue reading the passage in just a bit....

So, there are a couple things in today's passage today about dying well, starting right here in these verses. **First, David acknowledges his death.** "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he says in verse 2. We don't know exactly how close to death he was at this point. Obviously, he's able to express himself, so it's not like literally in his last hours. But clearly the end is near, so he may as well acknowledge it. But the fact is, you don't have to wait until that point to acknowledge it – and in fact, he mentions death in a number of Psalms he wrote, so he probably did think about it some before this.

Arthur Brooks, a former Seattleite, though born in Spokane, and a Catholic Christian who now teaches graduate level classes at Harvard, has studied and written extensively on the topic of "how to build a happy life." In an article titled, "Think About Your Death and Live Better" he writes, "**...even if you believe in an afterlife (as I do), facing discomfort and thinking seriously**

about the impermanence of your mortal life is important for making decisions that enhance your happiness” (Arthur C. Brooks, *Think About Your Death and Live Better*).

Now, it's not that “happiness” is the end-all, be-all, especially for followers of Jesus (he never says “follow me and I’ll make you happy!”), and I’m sure Arthur Brooks would agree. But the point is: As uncomfortable as it makes us, it is healthy and good to remember that we get a short window of time here on earth. Acknowledging this not just at the end, but throughout your life, is healthy, leads to a better life with better decisions, and when the time comes to breathe your last and “go the way of all the earth” as David puts it, will help you to “die well”.

A second thing we see in these verses is closely connected to the first point about intentionally keeping the inevitable in front of us. So: **Second, in order to die well, it helps to live well in the first place.** This does not mean you have to live perfectly. That would be stressful, right? How would you define a “perfectly lived life” anyway? But we do see David pass along to Solomon some words of wisdom on how to live well: **“Be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses” (1 Kings 2:2b-3a).**

Now, to our ears, telling your son to “be strong and act like a man” sounds like hyper-masculinity or cultural machismo. But in the Hebrew context, what he’s telling Solomon to do is trust God...to be strong in the Lord, and to live with maturity beyond his years. Solomon is somewhere between 12 and 15 at this point.¹ So, not an ideal age to be in a position of leading a whole nation – right? We don’t want early teenagers leading our countries. He just wants to play 1,000 B.C. versions of video games and basketball. Most boys that age today tend to be impulsive and selfish, struggling to put others first. It takes maturity to overcome those things. And that’s what David is communicating, because a king needs that maturity.

And the way to live well, he says, is to live as God requires. Be obedient to all that God says, as written in the Law of Moses. “Law of Moses” is

another way of talking about the Covenant God makes with the nation of Israel, through Moses a few hundred years earlier, that we read about in Exodus 19-24. It includes the 10 commandments, other covenantal requirements, and so forth, for the Israelites to keep. God's part of the covenant was that he would treasure and cherish his people and make them a holy nation, a "set apart" nation, to be a light and example to the other nations around them so that God would be glorified, so God's name would be made known.

The promise to David several centuries after Moses is that the kingly leadership of Israel would be an everlasting kingdom, and it would come through his descendants if he and the successors will keep their part of the covenant. And that's why David tells Solomon to do these things here. *Do your part, and God will bless you and the generations that come*, in other words. It's a God-centered generational legacy he's wanting to leave, centered around living rightly. We'll come back to this in a moment, but let's finish out the rest of the passage (**1 Kings 2:5-11**).

At first read, this is a bit shocking. The counsel about revenge toward two people overshadows the grace he counsels for the other. In fact, when I planned out this series a year ago or so, after my initial reading of this passage here's what I wrote, "Ends on kind of a sour note, if you ask me – 'use your wisdom' he says to Solomon, then basically tells him what to do – mostly, exacting revenge on other people."

In preparation for today's message, I've realized that my initial thoughts were a bit of a hot-take, and not based on a careful reading of what's going on. Joab had murdered two people in cold blood, essentially an act of treason to Israel and David's leadership. Shimei had cursed David publicly when David's son Absalom rebelled and tried to take over the throne. So, both show themselves to be untrustworthy and disloyal. But these aren't just personal affronts to David. Remember, **God's promise is for the nation of Israel: that there would be an eternal kingdom through David and the generations to come. So, the disloyalty of these two men is not just about David, but about the nation and is an affront to God's covenant promises.** So, he's counseling Solomon *not* to overlook these dangerous

guys who have shown themselves to be disruptive and destabilizing forces to what God is doing. But he leaves it in Solomon's hands, telling him twice to be wise in how he handles these men.

Later, both men act out against Solomon. For instance, Joab sides with Solomon's brother, Adonijah, in a powerplay move against Solomon to set up Adonijah to take over the throne (which means that's twice he's sided with a son of David's efforts to overthrow the throne). So, Solomon, in his wisdom, waited before dealing with these guys, to see if either one of them, or both of them, might prove to be loyal to him, even if their loyalty to David was questionable. As it turns out, they were questionable in their loyalty to him, as well.

Now, none of this is to say that David's counsel to Solomon about Joab and Shimei should just be looked over or approved. Especially with Shimei, where David says in verse 9, "Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood"...No one on this side of Jesus would call this "Christ-like," that's for sure. David struggles with vengeance, when Scripture tells us that vengeance is the Lord's (Dt. 32:35, later in Romans 12 also). So, we see that: **Even a leader, a king no less, who is "a man after God's own heart," is not perfect in his walk with God.** He's complex. He's got his flaws. His vision is clouded. His faith is faulty. His trust of God wavers. He's not a perfect king, not a perfect man of faith.

Not only does David fall short, so does Solomon. In fact, so do all the kings that come after. None are perfect. Through our human eyes, some fall short further than others, perhaps, but no one is perfect. So, here's the key to dying well that we learn from David. First, are you willing to acknowledge the uncomfortable truth that you will die one day? (Don't raise your hand on that!) If so, then take good notes right now, because here's the absolute key to dying well. Are you ready? Here it is: **The key to dying well is to live well: "observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses."** Just do that! Live it all out perfectly, keep every decree, keep every command, every law, every regulation, and you are

good with God. How's that sound? And as the world would encourage you with this: Good luck with that!

The problem, of course is that we *can't* do that. We can't keep them perfectly. (If you aren't familiar with it all...trust me, you'll fall short.) Even just the 10 Commandments, let alone any others. Don't covet, don't bear false witness, keep the Sabbath day holy and a day of rest, honor your father and mother...I mean with just those four, people keep dropping the ball, fumbling it away, let alone the idols in our lives that we allow to take priority over God, and our inability to have no other gods before our Heavenly Father. We just can't keep up our end of the Covenant with God. We fall short of that every time.

Or maybe you and I are different and I shouldn't make assumptions about you based on my own shortcomings. Maybe you feel ready to stand before the holy and righteous God of eternity and the universe based on your works, your life, your heart for God. Maybe you think you're "good enough." The problem is that what *we think* doesn't matter. It's what *God* thinks. It's his standard that matters. As Paul puts it in the New Testament, in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Like David, we may very well be men and women who are after God's heart. But it also means we're more like David's shortcomings and the stuff that makes him a complex person than we might care to admit: we fall really short of walking with God the way God calls us to. We are far from faithful. And just like we may tend to live in denial of death, it's easy to live in denial of our shortcomings of God's standards. We want to think we're good enough. Thinking otherwise is bad news. And it is bad news: we fall short.

But here's the good news: God is perfectly faithful. He upholds his covenant promises, including that the throne of David would be established forever. And David's lineage leads right to Jesus' earthly parents.² And Jesus, fully human and a son of David because of their lineage; and also fully divine as the Son of God...all of that is what we celebrate at Christmas, that God has come to us...that fullness of both Divinity and humanity in him is a mystery that Scripture proclaims but we can't comprehend...but you put it together and we see that Jesus is the perfect king who fulfills the Old

Covenant, the Mosaic Law, on our behalf. Where the sacrifice of an animal without blemish was done in the Old Testament as an atonement for sin, Jesus is that atoning sacrifice for us on the cross. And he can do it because he lived without blemish. He's the humble king who lived without sin, who gave his life on the cross on your behalf. On my behalf. On behalf of anyone who would confess their sin and their need to get right with God, and then trust Jesus to be the one who makes that possible for them, and follow him.

So, here's what it all boils down to: if you want to die well, then live well. **And you live well *not* by living a perfect life** (sorry...I kind of mis-led earlier!), **but by *trusting* in the one who lived a perfect life for you: Jesus Christ. This is the heart of the gospel.** This is the heart of Jesus' ministry. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says he came *not* to abolish the Mosaic law, but to *fulfill* it. To meet the requirements. By his own words, he says that he is doing for us what we can't do on our own. Everything David tells Solomon to do here, but he falls short of, Jesus accomplishes.

Later, in Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, **“Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).** He's not just talking about the burdens of working a job, raising kids, getting good grades in school, trying to maintain some friendships, rooting for the Mariners (tough to do lately), affording a place to live, and so forth...as burdensome as they can all be...He's talking very specifically about the burden of trying to live out the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law that David is speaking about in today's passage. Jesus is acknowledging that trying to live by that is burdensome. It wears you down. It's heavy. But Jesus does the heavy lifting for us not by abolishing the Old Covenant, but by fulfilling it and establishing a New Covenant through faith in Him. And that frees you up to live well, to live for God, to trust Jesus...and ultimately then, to die well. **You can have peace in your life and your death knowing that Jesus has done the hard work for you.**

Our part is to receive this gift of grace by confessing our sin...to acknowledge that we're more like David's vengeful side, and his lusting side, and his murderous side...to confess all that, and repent of it (turn away

from it), and trust Jesus, following him each and every day. We walk with him, seeking to become more and more like him because of what he's done. That's what being a disciple of Jesus is. And it's an everyday thing, not just on Sundays, so we live each day as lights to the world, leading others toward Jesus so they could also live well, and die well because of Jesus.

So, let's not deny our death. Let's not be afraid to consider that one day, we'll breathe our last. And then let that drive you to trust in the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords, who didn't just live well, but lived perfectly so that our eternal future is changed when we trust him. And because of that, *we* can live well, and like David, die well, knowing that when we "go the way of all the earth" God will welcome us into his everlasting arms. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ After the sermon someone pointed out to me that Solomon would have gone through his Bar Mitzvah if he was at least 12 years old, and in Jewish culture that meant (means) you're considered "a man". So, "act like a man" could also be rooted in that, and the expectations that come with it, and make it more culturally acceptable.

² I mentioned this briefly off-the cuff in the sermon....The different genealogies in Matthew and Luke both lead to King David. Some have wondered why, from David down to the parents, there are differences, when both genealogies seem to lead to Joseph, Jesus' earthly father. (For instance, Joseph has two different dads, apparently, if both are his genealogy!) What is probably happening is that in Luke, the genealogy is Mary's, but is traced to her husband as a son in law/son of Heli. Technically, he's a "son-in-law" but even in our modern American culture, where in-law relationships are good, the "in-law" will often be dropped as a sign of affection and inclusion in the family ("I haven't lost a daughter, rather, I've gained a son" kind of language/thinking). And in their culture especially, which traced genealogies through the men, it would make additional sense for Joseph to sort of be a "stand-in" for Mary, even though this is (likely) her genealogical record. It explains why there's a different man listed in each one as "Joseph's father", which would be odd. Instead, Luke's likely actually leads to Mary.