

“Making Sense of Things”

II Sam. 5:1-12
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Intro to text: This text records the consolidation of the kingdom under David. Prior to where our text picks up, David had already been anointed king of Judah, and here he becomes king of the northern tribes as well. Then the text relates the capture of Jerusalem, which became the capitol of the kingdom. After that, it records the construction of David’s residence. But note the last verse: David knew that God’s hand was in this for the sake of his people Israel.

After this,

1. David went on to become the greatest king Israel ever had, and
2. The nation reached its greatest size and influence in history.

(Reading of the text.)

Intro to sermon: We all struggle to make sense out of life. If things are going wrong, why? And what do I to do fix it? If things are going well—well, that’s not a problem, that’s wonderful!

Actually, handling success may be one of the more difficult things we have to do.

- Who gets the credit for my success?
- (If we follow the admonition “To thine own self be true.”) In my own mind, who is really responsible for my success?
- How does being successful—in whatever field—change my character?

We’ve all had successes from time to time. This morning’s text describes some events in the life of a man who scripture twice describes as “a man after God’s own heart,” and the way he saw these successes.

(Dealing with David and character always brings to mind David and Bathsheba and the death of her husband, Uriah. That’s a good ways into the future from the happenings in this passage. If I understand Bill McIvor’s plans, he intends to preach on the Bathsheba and Uriah on the last Sunday of this month.)

Text-Background. The successes we're considering are those related to the consolidation of power after the first king of Israel, Saul, and his son, Jonathan, had been killed in battle. David is of the tribe of Judah, and when our text begins, he has already been anointed its king. He has set up his capitol in Hebron, a city about 20 miles south of Jerusalem.

A. King of all Israel. The first part of the text (vs's 1-5) deals with David's being chosen king over the northern tribes. Our text describes the gathering of the tribes at the southern capitol of Hebron, where the understanding is reached:

- David is their kin (son of Jacob and son of Abraham);
- David has been their military commander under Saul (who is now dead); and
- God had said through the Prophet Samuel that David would become king.

So in the sanctuary (before God) they made a covenant with David that he should be their King.

All that sounds very wholesome. But what precedes it (II Sam. 1-4) is the details of the succession of power where there is no established process. It is what you would hope wouldn't happen, but you know might: it is messy. There is war, political intrigue, betrayal, assassination, and revenge. And at least one of the people involved in the killing is Joab, who is David's nephew and the person who becomes Israel's military commander under King David. David navigates this—I believe with his integrity intact—but reading those passages is unsettling to the 21st C. Christian reader.

Emphasis: David has been chosen by the elders of the tribes of Israel (in spite of the messy side of this), he didn't impose himself. His kingship is embraced by the people. And this is a wonderful position to be in as a new king.

B. Jerusalem and the nation. Next in our text (vs's 6-10) comes the capture of Jerusalem. Reading the text may be confusing, but the gist of it is the taunt that the blind and the lame could keep David out, because the place is such a naturally defensible position. David takes Jerusalem, strengthens it, and makes it the national capitol.

One thing to see here is David's skill as a battlefield commander. We know from other places that not only does he breach the defenses, he does so without destroying the city or killing many of the inhabitants. He then adds to what had been a powerful citadel, and soon wins over the allegiance of the populace as well.

It turns out that Jerusalem is on the border between Judah and the northern tribes. Furthermore, it wasn't formerly a city of either side. This makes it a natural capitol for the newly reunited nation.

And David, as a man of faith, soon establishes the worship center there by bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. (Remember our Psalm reading of the morning.) This makes Jerusalem the political and religious center of the country.

And for King David, the new national leader, consolidating all of this in Jerusalem is a great move.

C. International. Part of being King is international relations, and David is beginning to attract attention internationally. Hiram, king of Tyre, sent his craftsmen and build David a palace. (Understand: Tyre depends on good relations with Israel, so its king's gesture is not strange.) This gesture from outside the country furthers the impression that David's consolidation of his kingdom is solid.)

D. David's acknowledgment of God. How does David handle success? In vs. 10, we are told, "And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him."

Vs. 12 reads: "David then perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel."

Let's note some things about David and these exploits:

1. David acknowledges that the Lord was behind his being crowned as King, and the events that surrounded his kingdom being really firmly established.
2. Further, David acknowledges that God has done this for a purpose, and that purpose is his care for his people Israel.
3. David is a gifted man—a warrior, a political leader, a poet and musician, a man of faith. In my reading of his life, he's not given to excessive humility. For example, when asked why he thought he could kill Goliath, he didn't just say, "God will be with me," he described his life as a shepherd, and killing bears and lions to protect his sheep.
4. But with equal freedom, David acknowledges that the Lord has given him his gifts, and in this case, David understands that it's not his native abilities which have established him as king. God has done this. And it's not for his own personal prosperity that God has given him the throne. His mission is the development of the nation in every way: spiritually, politically commercially.

Application. Suppose you were David? You are a highly gifted person, and everything has been going your way, and now you've been crowned King?

It's hard to compare ourselves to David. One reason is because he's a king; and in addition, he's such a gifted person in so many areas. And yet in our own lives, there are some areas in which we shine. And there are times in which things go well for us. How do we regard our success?

To begin with, it's a gift of God. That's an easy and obvious thing for a preacher to say on Sunday morning. But bear in mind that David spent years living faithfully and working hard to see this through. We did not look at all of David's life, but if we had, we would have seen that he spent years as a fugitive from the jealous King Saul between the time he was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king, and the time his kingdom was actually consolidated in the events we have considered this morning. David worked hard for this for years.

You may have worked years to develop your business, or your place in the company or on the team or whatever your achievement may be. It may be a stretch to compare that with being the King of Israel, but it's nonetheless a gift of God. And seeing our accomplishments in that light makes a huge difference in how we treat them.

One way to symbolize my accomplishments by a tightly closed hand. "I did this, and it's mine. The credit is mine; benefits are mine; the results are mine; thanks be to me!" If David were here, I think he would say, 'Yes, you worked hard, and you should feel good about that. You have been a diligent worker. But God established the results, and it is to him that thanks and praise are due.' I would symbolize that attitude by the open hand. My success is available for God to do with as he will—and I'm open to being led about that.

Another way of saying this is that I'm a steward of my success, not its absolute master. I hold my success as a trust from God. Did David benefit from being King of Israel? Of course he did. But he was given that position for the sake of God's people, Israel. Do we benefit from our positions? Of course we do. But the way I use my position is for the honor and glory of the God who gave it to me. Other attitudes are simply unworthy of who we are as followers of Jesus, and unworthy of who God is...