

THE KING-MAKER

by Steve Zeisler

David recorded his spiritual journey in Psalm 18. At the end, verses 43-50, he reflects on what it means to be king:

You have delivered me from the attacks of the people;
you have made me the head of nations;
people I did not know are subject to me.

As soon as they hear me, they obey me;
foreigners cringe before me.

They all lose heart;
they come trembling from their strongholds.

The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!

Exalted be God my Savior!

He is the God who avenges me,
who subdues nations under me,
who saves me from my enemies.

You exalted me above my foes;
from violent men you rescued me.

Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD;
I will sing praises to your name.

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

God is in the king-making business. Whether men or women, we are destined in Christ to be made royal children, those who have the influence of kings in our generation. And that's what David discovered about himself.

This psalm tells of a desert wanderer caught in a flash flood, fearing for his life. God not only dealt with the immediate danger, but made the needy soul righteous, filled him with hope, and set him to fight against the foes that had afflicted him.

Remember in verses 30-35 (Discovery Paper 4494) we focused on the statement, "You stoop down to make me great." God's condescension is to make something remarkable of us. But it doesn't come easily. The making of kings is a lifelong process.

Although king-making is not a quick or easy deal, it's the most exciting thing in the world to realize that that's what the Lord is doing---stooping down to make you great, establishing you (man or woman) as a royal son.

We'll try to unpack what we're given here in verses 43-50 by asking two questions to start with. The first is, who qualifies for royalty? The second question is, what does it mean to express sovereignty or kingship in the

world we live in? We live in a democracy, which makes the concept unfamiliar. Further, our Lord's reign on earth isn't seen or recognized, and we're going to live as kings in ways that are unrecognized. What does it mean for us to express ourselves as his regents on earth?

How to become a king

Let's consider the first question. Verse 50 makes an important point. This monarchy (David and his descendants), unlike others, will last forever. David sees (less perfectly than we do now) that he is going to have one Son who will gather up all kings; that he is king because his Son will be king. Most of the time, someone who ascends the throne does so because he is the son of the former king. David's case was exactly the reverse. He became king because his Son would be king. The Lord Jesus, the King of kings, the Sovereign who would descend to earth and rule as Messiah, would come from his line. And just as David recognized that he ultimately would experience life on the throne because his Son would be king, it is in Christ that anyone ascends to the place of royalty.

In the question of who qualifies to be made king, then, the door is thrown wide open. You don't have to be born in the right family. You don't have to have marvelous gifts and accomplishments that qualify you to be king.

David had none of those. He was anointed by Samuel years before he could act as king. For some time he served in Saul's army. But eventually he was banished from Saul's presence, and he launched out on his own. He had to lie to priests to get food for his men and a weapon for himself. When he lived among the Philistines, he had to pretend to be insane to survive---foaming at the mouth, writing graffiti---so his enemies wouldn't kill him.

We're told of his first followers in 1 Samuel 22:1-2: "David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam....All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him." The first ones to respond to his royal leadership were the people who had failed at everything, whose debts had ruined their lives, whose anger and discontentment had destroyed relationships, who had been marginalized by society.

You may recall how David was anointed king. Samuel was sent to Jesse to anoint one of his sons. Jesse got his sons together, and they passed before Samuel, all except for the youngest, least favored son, who was left out with the sheep; no thought was given to him. But the Lord did not pick any of the older sons, so Samuel asked, "Isn't there another?" Well, yes, there was David---what a ridiculous thought. But David was brought in, and it was he who received the anointing as king.

David wrote of his upbringing in Psalm 27:

"Do not reject me or forsake me,
O God my Savior.

Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me."

He evidently experienced rejection in his own home by his parents.

What qualifications are these? What accomplishments, what aristocratic upbringing, what glorious background led to David's sovereignty? None. God said there was one qualification in an observation he made to Samuel. At David's anointing Samuel was quizzical as to why this youth was chosen and not the others. He was told, "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). David's only qualification for sovereignty was a soft heart toward his Maker, the God of Israel.

That means that you and I can attain royalty. Everyone who will ever live has the option of having a soft heart toward God, being a man after God's heart as David was declared to be, falling in love with the One who

made him. That alone qualifies us to be a king, to serve God as a royal son.

The New Testament uses the language of reigning in life, of kingly authority in a number of places. They remind us that we can be kings because the Son of David is king. There is only one who has the right to rule, and he gathers all others to him. In being gathered to him, we receive what he has by nature: power, authority, standing, sovereignty, and greatness. We receive it as a gift, just as David did.

Let's look at Ephesians 1:18-23. We will never discover for ourselves what this is speaking of unless God acts in response to our earnest prayer. These are spiritually apprised truths. Paul says, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." There is no way to say more clearly that our Lord Jesus, seated at the right hand of God the Father, is king over all kings now and forever. And we join Jesus in his royal position on his throne in heaven, ruling. Everything else is beneath his feet, but the church is his body, his bride. The church participates with him in his rule, in all places and at all times. We become kings because he is king. We exert kingly influence in the world, whether we can see it or not.

Revelation 5:9-10 says:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Romans 5:17 makes another striking observation about what it means to be a royal figure, a king: "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man [that is, Adam's sin began the reign of death on earth in every generation since Adam], how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." How much more will death be reversed in us. We ourselves, royal figures, reign in life, established in the place where we live, influential in the circles we've been given to move in, no longer victims of death, but those who reign in life.

How to reign in life

The second question I suggested: What is life as a king like? As we know, although Christ is king over all and all is under his feet, his rule is invisible until he returns. He is exercising his authority through his people and by means of the Spirit, but he is not insisting on recognition. Our influence on others will often be invisible to us. What it means to be a king is to have authority, to say meaningful things, to live lives having repercussions that last forever. There is real substance to the things we do. That's what it means to be a king, not to have the temporary bluster that goes with so much authority in this world and is forgotten days or months later, to live for the temporary flash of recognition.

Ray Luevano and I were hitting golf balls at a driving range at Moffett Field a few months ago. Earlier that day Air Force One had come flying in from Washington and landed at Moffett Field. President Clinton was off addressing a group somewhere, and there were important officials traveling with the president who wanted to play golf. There were many people waiting to play, but the important officials went to the front of the line, and everyone else of whatever rank waiting had to step aside because the Commander-in-Chief and his people had the clout to displace them. But after this president is out of office, those same people will have no authority to bump anyone else from any position. Their influence is based on political power, which is always short-lived. But royalty is about real influence that lasts forever, that changes lives. It's often invisible.

The most influential people in your life are not the people who have held important titles (or if they are, it's irrelevant to their influence). The people who have touched you most deeply, whom you most want to be like, whose influence doesn't fade, are men and women of godly character. That's what really changes us, not what is said on television or in newspapers. Popular influence is short-lived. We qualify as kings by having hearts for the Lord. Lasting (royal) influence comes from such hearts as well.

The following piece appeared in the New York Times and was reprinted in the San Jose Mercury last week. It's about an eighty-eight-year-old woman in Mississippi:

The washerwoman's gift of \$150,000 to finance scholarships at the local college had taken much of her long and lonely life to save. Oseola McCarty made the gift as she felt her own time creeping to a close, as worsening arthritis made it hard for her to work or sometimes even stand.

She had lived by herself since 1967, between rows of hanging clothes, a shy, stooped woman of 88 years who always had a lot to say, just no one to say it to in the quiet little house on Miller Street....That unselfish gift---she did not even ask for a brick to be dedicated in her name---has infused her life with color and experiences and delivered her from the isolation of her past....People, famous and ordinary, sought her out and called her holy. She even made it to New York. Hotel maids there loved her, because she made her own bed...

McCarty still does not care even a little bit about material things. She has bought some nice things for herself, but only what she needs for appearances' sake. She lives in the same house that she has all of her life, left to her by an uncle in 1947. She still turns on the air conditioner only when company comes. She did not trade in her raggedy Bible for a new one, but it has been rebound in leather to keep the pages in proper order....

It all started to change July 26, 1995, when she asked her bank to give her life savings away. She had spent very little over the years, living so simply, amassing a small fortune a few one-dollar bills at a time....Harvard has made her an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, and while she is not absolutely certain what that is, she is proud to have it. The National Urban League made her a Community Hero. The National Institute of Social Science gave her a gold medal....she carried the Olympic torch and won the Wallenberg Humanitarian Award. When Roberta Flack sang Amazing Grace to her at a National Urban League dinner in New York, she cried, not just because of the place or the circumstances, but because she has always loved the song.

The story goes on to list dignitaries and others who have sought her out and have knelt at her feet, who realize that eighty-eight years of being godly, honest, caring, and unself-impressed made her someone having depth that most of the dignitaries know nothing about. Oseola McCarty has royal influence on her generation at age eighty-eight, because she took an action that was consistent with who she was on the inside, and who she was on the inside was of the Lord. People want to be around her, and they want to know what makes her tick.

He gives his king great victories

Let's look carefully now at some details of this section of Psalm 18. Verses 43-45:

"You have delivered me from the attacks of the people;
you have made me the head of nations;
people I did not know are subject to me.

As soon as they hear me, they obey me;
foreigners cringe before me.

They all lose heart;
they come trembling from their strongholds."

The key statement is, "As soon as they hear me they obey me...." The king's words are powerful.

There are two interesting Hebrew terms here. One is the term translated "the people," which is almost always

used of the people of Israel, that is the people who knew God and his word. They attacked David. David was opposed by Saul, Absalom, Shimei and other Israelites. Second, he mentions the nations, the Gentile outsiders, those who look at faith from a distance. And he had influence among them as well. Both strangers and insiders listened to him. Strongholds were emptied because of him, lives were changed. His role as king was to be an agent of change, peace, order, challenge, and victory. That is still true of kings. When Oseola McCarty talks about her prayers, her Bible, and the songs she loves, the people who hear her find themselves changed.

Verse 46 tells us some of what David says when he talks and they obey:

"The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!
Exalted be God my Savior!"

Look at the verbs in verses 47 and following:

"He is the God who avenges me,
who subdues nations under me,
who saves me from my enemies.

You exalted me above my foes;
from violent men you rescued me."

David can talk about what the living God does because he has an intimate knowledge of it. He is not recounting other people's experience with God. He is saying, "My God lives, my Savior is exalted." When he speaks about his God, he's speaking about his friend, someone he knows and has an honest relationship with, someone he has walked with and wrestled with and been changed by. David was a man after God's heart, so he could speak about the Lord. His words had weight and lives were changed and people listened.

That's ultimately the heart of what it means to be king, to have influence. If people know you know God, they will listen to what you say. If your exaltation of God and your declaration of what he's done for you are authentic because they are true and they have transformed your heart, your words and your life will affect people. When people hear you, they will obey what you have to say. Strongholds will be emptied, enemies will be pushed back, and changes will occur if what we say about God we can say from the heart, and if the truth we declare is the truth of Scripture.

Verse 50 is the last verse in the psalm. What does God do for his kings, for those whom he has established as royal children?

"He gives his king great victories;
he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed...."

Are there any victories that you still need to have happen in your life, fights that you haven't won yet? Can you anticipate that he would give you great victories? And his kindness never fails, his loyal love never goes out of fashion. Every time we turn to him, what we see is the merciful face of God; what we experience is his love, his embrace.

And the way God deals with his royal children lasts forever, as the last line of the psalm tells us:

"...to David and his descendants forever."

Those whom he makes king have the greatest opportunity of all: to cast whatever crowns they're given at his feet when they enter his presence. He makes us royal children so we can declare the greatness of his sovereignty, so we can say things about him that will affect other people, so that we can magnify the One who has stooped down to make us great.

I've been pierced, challenged, and built up by the study of this psalm. We've gone from the drowning to the

rescue to the change to the fight to the establishment as a royal son. It's a wonderful summary of David's life and a word of hope to all of us who are growing in Christ.

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