

## **Rightful Authority**

It was Abraham Lincoln who said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.” Once someone has authority, power, influence, we find out very quickly what sort of person he is. We find out if he is self-serving or self-sacrificing, if he is conceited or humble, if he is self-indulgent or of great self-control. Authority, and its hand-maiden, money, show what is in the heart.

David was a man after God's own heart, a man whom God could entrust with authority, as opposed to Saul, who abused and misused his authority.

The last episodes in David's life are fittingly about authority. Next week in 1 Kings 2, we'll see true authority established. Today, in 1 Kings 1, we'll see false authority stolen by the illegitimate. In this passage we'll see an illegitimate authority, Adonijah, stealing a role, as well as a rightful authority, David, not performing his role. We'll see that false authority is first cocky when it thinks it's in power but then cowardly when it is confronted, while true authority is first humble before its moment then decisive. The contrasts between David and Adonijah, and Adonijah and Solomon give us another picture into the kind of authority that pleases God.

It also shows us the kind of authority we should seek out, and the kind of authorities we should be. The ultimate authority, Christ, has all the attributes of true, humble authority. Satan has all the attributes of false, usurping authority. The one you follow says a lot about you. You are who you attract, and you are who you are attracted to. If you are drawn to the arrogant authority of ungodly leaders, it may be that you still live in the family of the very first rebel authority, Satan. If you are drawn to the meek authority of Jesus, it may be that you are in His family, or at least being drawn into it.

And when you are in authority, as a husband, parent, pastor, deacon, teacher, manager, the way you exercise authority says the same thing about you.

So as we walk through this narrative, let us keep our eye on who is on the throne, and how he is leading, who wants to be on the throne, and how he's trying, and who is meant to be on the throne.

### **I. The Condition of the King**

Now King David was old, advanced in years; and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm. <sup>2</sup> Therefore his servants said to him, “Let a young woman, a virgin, be sought for our lord the king, and let her stand before the king, and let her care for him; and let her lie in your bosom, that our lord the king may be warm.” <sup>3</sup> So they sought for a lovely young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. <sup>4</sup> The young woman was very lovely; and she cared for the king, and served him; but the king did not know her.

David is one of those few heroes of history whose whole life we see: when in his unconquerable youth, and when in his declining last years. Many Greek heroes die young in battle, apparently preserving the romance of their characters. But the Bible gives us a full life here, from the stone-slinging youth to now the sad scene of a trembling man, wracked by cold.

The words of David's courtiers actually reminds us of when Saul's courtiers said, “Let them seek out a man skilled in playing the lyre” which actually led to David entering the court as a teenager.

The suggestion by David's servants is not what it appears to our ears. Ancient writers like Galen and Josephus record that this was regarded as a kind of medical prescription: to have someone lie down next to an ailing person without warmth. Verse 4 tells us she was a nurse to David, not a concubine,

there were no physical relations. But having said that, note that the Hebrews did not for a moment think it would have been acceptable for a man to lie down next to David. If someone was going to lie down next to David, it was going to be a beautiful woman: Abishag the Shunnamite.

But nothing sexual is here: in fact it is a stark reversal of the Bathsheba story, only now we see the foolishness of lust and adultery, when extreme old age has set in.

But all this tells us that David's condition is frail, sickly, and declining. These are clearly his last days, and it is in the last days of the king that conspiracies and pretenders to the throne begin to see their opportunity. When authorities are weakening, and they have neglected to create a succession plan, evil is quick to be sucked into that vacuum.

## II. The Conspiracy of Adonijah

<sup>5</sup> Then 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. <sup>6</sup> (And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, "Why have you done so?" He *was* also very good-looking. *His mother* had borne him after Absalom.) <sup>7</sup> Then he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they followed and helped Adonijah. <sup>8</sup> But Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and the mighty men who *belonged* to David were not with Adonijah. <sup>9</sup> And Adonijah sacrificed sheep and oxen and fattened cattle by the stone of Zohaleth, which *is* by En Rogel; he also invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants. <sup>10</sup> But he did not invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men, or Solomon his brother.

Adonijah was the fourth son of David. Amnon, the first, had been killed by Absalom. Absalom had been killed by Joab during his rebellion. The third son Cheliab had apparently died sometime earlier. Adonijah (whose name means My Lord is Yah) was the next in line in terms of succession or birth order. But he was not the one chosen as king. We saw last week that when David prepared the Temple, he made it very clear who would be building that Temple: his son Solomon. Solomon would be king, and the architect, builder, and protector of the Temple.

Verse 5 in the Hebrew is literally: *Adonijah was giving himself airs*. He is quite simply repeating everything his older brother Absalom had done when he attempted to seize the throne. He is charming and good looking like Absalom was. He has royal runners announcing him. Like Absalom who gathered to himself people close to the king like Ahithophel, so Adonijah includes in his conspiracy Joab, the army general and Abiathar the High priest.

We can understand why he included Joab. Joab was always willing to become the permanent protector of a patron. Probably Joab did not like Solomon, the man of peace, pupil of Nathan the prophet, more religious than warlike. But we don't know why Abiathar followed Adonijah, when David had been good to him, and protected him his whole life.

But Adonijah deliberately excludes from his conspiracy the other high priest, Zadok, as well as the prophet Nathan, or any of David's bodyguards or mighty men.

And just like Absalom had held an enthronement feast for himself in Hebron, so Adonijah does so. This time it is just two miles away from Jerusalem. But note whom he invites, and whom he does not: he also invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants. <sup>10</sup> But he did not invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men, or Solomon his brother.

This is not some accidental mistake on Adonijah's part, that somehow he didn't know that Solomon had been chosen, and this was innocent on his part. No, Adonijah is exploiting his father's weak condition to set himself up as king before there is a formal coronation of Solomon.

False authority must always work in secret, in the back rooms of whispered conversations, in the secretly shared WhatsApp messages, the for-your-eyes-only email. True authority need not skulk and whisper and gather supporters. Like Jesus, who preached publicly in the Temple, and made His claims known to all, so true authority has nothing to hide, and so no need for secrecy.

But this kind of arrogant usurping of someone else's place began very early in Adonijah's life. Verse 6 lays the blame back onto David's parenting: (And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, "Why have you done so?")

David's parenting had been permissive. Instead of correcting his son, stopping his son from doing certain things, spanking his son, stopping his tantrums in their tracks, insisting that his son stop whining, don't interrupt, greet these adults politely, don't run wildly across the Tabernacle area, apparently David had not rebuked him at any time. Through the little years, into the middle years, and the teen years and the young adult years, David had preferred a lack of confrontation, and a lack of conflict over necessary correction. If you want your child to struggle with authority his or her whole life, then make sure you never assert your own authority on your child. The surest way to raise someone who hates and disregards authority is to tiptoe around your child and act like your own authority is a bad thing, an evil thing. Be embarrassed about using your authority for your child's sake, and the irony is that your child will come to despise you.

Here is a stark warning to parents. Every sin in your child you are willing to live with does not go away. It plants itself in the soil of the child and begins to grow. Next time you want to deal with it, it is no longer a seed, but a plant with roots. You can still pluck it up, but leave it again, and it becomes a young tree. Make excuses and leave it again, and your young adult now has a tree trunk of some sin fully grown in their life. The earlier you deal with it, the better. God gives you the right and the ability to teach your children to honour and obey. David failed in this area, and once again, it was here to bite him. David was one of those men able to be a brilliant authority in one realm of life, and a dismal failure in another: an incredible king, and a terrible father.

Adonijah was now so far gone, there was no hope of recovering him. There was only the hope of saving Solomon's life.

### **III. The Confronting of the King**

<sup>11</sup> So Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king, and David our lord does not know *it*?" <sup>12</sup> Come, please, let me now give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. <sup>13</sup> Go immediately to King David and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord, O king, swear to your maidservant, saying, "Assuredly your son Solomon shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' <sup>14</sup> Then, while you are still talking there with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words."

The last time we met Bathsheba was twenty years prior to this, and back then we never heard any words from her, except her report that she was pregnant. But now, she plays the part of the wise woman interceding before the king, like Abigail, like the wise woman of Tekoa back in 2 Samuel 14. She must tell David that the oath he made to her is now being violated, and then to back up her words, the prophet Nathan will come in and ask why he was not informed that Adonijah was now king.

She goes in, and begins explaining what is happening, behind the back of this ailing king. But though he is sick and declining, he is still king, and the law still rests with him.

<sup>20</sup> And as for you, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel *are* on you, that you should tell them who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. <sup>21</sup> Otherwise it will happen, when my lord the king rests with his

fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted as offenders.”

If Adonijah is on the throne, Solomon will be executed, as will his mother. At this moment, Nathan the prophet comes in.

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And just then, while she was still talking with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in.<sup>23</sup>

So they told the king, saying, “Here is Nathan the prophet.” And when he came in before the king, he bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.<sup>24</sup>

And Nathan said, “My lord, O king, have you said, ‘Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne’?<sup>25</sup> For he has gone down today, and has sacrificed oxen and fattened cattle and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king’s sons, and the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest; and look! They are eating and drinking before him; and they say, ‘*Long live King Adonijah!*’<sup>26</sup>

But he has not invited me—me your servant—nor Zadok the priest, nor Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, nor your servant Solomon.<sup>27</sup> Has this thing been done by my lord the king, and you have not told your servant who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?” (1 Kings 1:22–27 )

Nathan asks if David has declared that Adonijah should be king, since he is busy with an enthronement feast with all the king's sons, and the army generals and Abiathar. But verse 26 tells us that this feast is indeed a conspiracy.

<sup>26</sup> But he has not invited me—me your servant—nor Zadok the priest, nor Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, nor your servant Solomon.<sup>27</sup> Has this thing been done by my lord the king, and you have not told your servant who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?

Nathan again shows his shrewdness in dealing with authority. He says, “Since you are the king, and things happen by your decree and permission, I assume this is something you've authorised, and it is just me that you haven't told?” In this way, Nathan does not accuse the old king of being decrepit and out of touch. He takes the position that the king is fully aware of what is going on, and then plays the part of the hurt friend who wasn't told.

David obviously didn't know, and the same permissive parenting has now become permissive ruling of a kingdom. His authority over his land now has gaping holes in it. He has been faithful, but he has not made a contingency plan for when he is sick, ailing and weak.

If David does not organise an impromptu coronation of Solomon, then not only is the kingdom going to go to the wrong person, but it interrupts the Davidic covenant, it upsets the Temple plans, and will mean the execution of all the people closest to David, if not David himself.

#### IV. The Coronation of Solomon

<sup>28</sup> Then King David answered and said, “Call Bathsheba to me.” So she came into the king’s presence and stood before the king.<sup>29</sup> And the king took an oath and said, “As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from every distress,<sup>30</sup> just as I swore to you by the LORD God of Israel, saying, ‘Assuredly Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,’ so I certainly will do this day.”

<sup>31</sup> Then Bathsheba bowed with *her* face to the earth, and paid homage to the king, and said, “Let my lord King David live forever!”

<sup>32</sup> And King David said, “Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.” So they came before the king.<sup>33</sup> The king also said to them, “Take with you the servants of your lord, and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and take him down to Gihon.<sup>34</sup> There let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel; and blow the horn, and say, ‘*Long live King Solomon!*’<sup>35</sup> Then you shall come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, and he shall be king in my place. For I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah.”

<sup>36</sup> Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king and said, “Amen! May the LORD God of my lord the king say so *too*.<sup>37</sup> As the LORD has been with my lord the king, even so may He be with Solomon, and make

his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.”

David first confirms the oath to Bathsheba. But then David does something different. Instead of simply announcing that Solomon will be king once he dies, David insists on Solomon replacing him as king that very day. David wants Solomon on his throne in his place. He knows he is no longer in a place of competency to rule this kingdom, and prevent the deviousness of people like Adonijah and Joab. He needs to install Solomon that day.

Here is a lesson for true authority. The man in authority understands his position is a means, not an end. He understands that when he can no longer do the job, he must make way for others. He loves what his authority means: life and health and leadership for others. He does not fall in love with the title, the position, the honour, the accolades, the fame. He can relinquish that for the good of the people he is leading.

He calls his loyalists: Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet. Solomon is to be placed on the royal mule. This is the first public expression that the kingship is going to him. He is to be taken down to the Gihon, a brook just outside the city walls. There both prophet and priest will anoint the new king. Having done so, Solomon will return to the palace, and publicly sit on David's throne. David reiterates: Solomon is my choice.

Zadok, Nathan and David's bodyguards Benaiah and his men carry out the instruction. We read in verse 39 that Zadok got the oil from the Tabernacle to emphasise its special, sacred status. They anoint Solomon, and then blow the shofar, and shout.

And we can see that the majority of the people in Jerusalem wanted Solomon, and not Adonijah to rule.

<sup>40</sup> And all the people went up after him; and the people played the flutes and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth *seemed to* split with their sound.

And thus ends the reign, though not the life, of King David. It is King *Solomon* now, while David's days wind to a close.

Well, all this commotion, and the sound of the ram's horn can be heard by those in the feast, just a few miles away.

## **V. The Cowardice of the Conspirators**

<sup>41</sup> Now Adonijah and all the guests who *were* with him heard *it* as they finished eating. And when Joab heard the sound of the horn, he said, “Why *is* the city in such a noisy uproar?” <sup>42</sup> While he was still speaking, there came Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest. And Adonijah said to him, “Come in, for you *are* a prominent man, and bring good news.”

<sup>43</sup> Then Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, “No! Our lord King David has made Solomon king.

Jonathan goes on to relate everything that Zadok and Nathan and the others have done to anoint and confirm Solomon as the new king. And not future king, but new king today.

<sup>48</sup> Also the king said thus, ‘Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel, who has given *one* to sit on my throne this day, while my eyes see *it!*’ ”

Well, the result is a wet blanket on this party, and the food in their mouths must have become instantly tasteless. They've gone from being part of the inner circle of the future king to being co-conspirators of a rebel usurper.

<sup>49</sup> So all the guests who were with Adonijah were afraid, and arose, and each one went his way.

The party breaks up very quickly, and people disperse, probably in all directions. Suddenly none of them were ever at this feast, and none of them will remember supporting Adonijah.

Adonijah, for his part, knows that what he meant to do to Solomon, is now coming back at him. His very life is in danger.

<sup>50</sup> Now Adonijah was afraid of Solomon; so he arose, and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. <sup>51</sup> And it was told Solomon, saying, "Indeed Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; for look, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.' "

Altars in Israel had four curved protuberances which they called the horns of the altar, probably because horns meant strength, and altars were for animal sacrifice. To grab the horns of the altar is the beginning of a tradition that extended well into the European Middle Ages – that the sanctuary is a refuge for a fleeing men, because the blood of war or crime or even justice should not be spilt there. Adonijah is basically begging for his life.

<sup>52</sup> Then Solomon said, "If he proves himself a worthy man, not one hair of him shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." <sup>53</sup> So King Solomon sent them to bring him down from the altar. And he came and fell down before King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, "Go to your house."

Adonijah receives mercy from King Solomon, on condition that he acts in a worthy fashion.

As it turns out in chapter 2, when David has already died, he will not be a worthy man. Instead, he will attempt to get the throne again through a foolish miscalculation. He will ask Solomon's mother to ask Solomon if he can have Abishag as his wife. But this goes back to when Absalom defiled David's concubines as a sign of having the throne. By marrying the one who last lay with David, Adonijah is seeking the throne again, probably encouraged by his co-conspirators Abiathar and Joab. Solomon will have to then act swiftly and with justice to put an end to this conspiracy.

It is the mark of false authority that it works with conspiracies and cliques to get into power, with smugness and cockiness believing it is certain of victory. Until the moment it is confronted and exposed, shown to be a rebellion, then suddenly it skulks away, tail between its legs. False authority goes from cocky to cowardly, and usually hovers in the shadows, biding its time.

But by contrast, here is the quiet Solomon, who has been humbly biding his time, who was not invited to Adonijah's feast, but hadn't run into David's throneroom in a panic. Here is the man who was promised the throne, but has not been squabbling for it, who has been charged to build the Temple, but is not fighting off Adonijah. But once he is lawfully enthroned, once the call of God has been publicly and legally confirmed, he acts decisively and swiftly. When the authority is his, he is not shy and bashful or embarrassed to have it. He wields it, not as a weapon to harm or intimidate, but as a tool to fix and maintain the stability of the kingdom.

This sounds just like the authority of Messiah Jesus.

He will not quarrel nor cry out, Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory; And in His name Gentiles will trust." (Matthew 12:19–21)

There is a reason that Jesus has been given a name above every name, a name to which every knee

bows, or to put it another way: ultimate authority. The reason Jesus has ultimate authority is because He exhibited ultimate humility. If you're on His side today, then that's the kind of character you respect, the kind of authority you exercise, the kind of authority you live under and show to others.