

GOD BLESSED DAVID AND HIS MIGHTY MEN.

1. Samuel 22:1-5, 2. Samuel 23:1-39

Key Verse: 2. Samuel 23:1

“These are the last words of David: “The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel’s singer of songs”

The books of 1 & II Samuel are mostly about David and his life. The last two chapters (2Sa 23 and 24) is the summary of David’s entire life. The Bible is quite forthright about David’s successes and failures. For example, 2Samuel 23 is about David’s wonderful testimony and his primary accomplishment in his life, namely his mighty men. Chapter 24 is about God’s awesome judgment on David’s pride. David’s life shows that apart from the grace of God no one can consistently do well to the end.

Phillips Brooks (12/13, 1835~1/23/1893, a great Christian leader) once said “Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks.” God’s mission requires strengths and powers far beyond our natural abilities. To the extent we desire to fulfill God’s purpose, we receive necessary strengths from above. Developing our capabilities is not about having some quick-fix programs, but to depend on God for the strengths we need.

Today’s message is about David’s last words. Here David looks back his life before God. He remembers each of his precious coworkers who shared dreams, hopes and sufferings together with him. With his own strength alone he would never have been able to fulfill God’s mission for his life. However, he(together with his fellow co-workers) served God’s purpose in his generation(Acts 13:36).

First, David walked with God—even to the end (1-7). 2 Samuel 23 is about David’s last words. It is unclear when David precisely wrote this. Probably, he wrote his short life testimony just before his death. These days I see the value of keep my thoughts in writing as practical means to walk with God. This year there was a wonderful gathering for a prayer mother. After losing her only son through tragic death, her soul was in inexpressible agonies. Often she documented her thoughts in the form of many beautiful poems. Her gentle husband compiled and published them as a fine book. While reading it, I felt like seeing a beautiful, refined soul before God.

Throughout his life (a little more than 70 years) he experienced numerous ups and downs. His many roles in life included a shepherd boy, a champion soldier, a fugitive, and a king of Israel. While pondering his final testimony in his last days, many of the joyful, painful and even shameful memories of the past might have passed through his mind. Look at the verse 1. “These are the last words of David: “The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel’s singer of songs” David never forgot about his humble origin. He was the son of Jesse (a very common man with no real influence). Even in this ordinary family David was routinely ignored. One day Prophet Samuel

visited Jesse's home and invited all his sons (1 Samuel 16:10-13). Every one came except David. David was not even informed of the occasion and therefore he was left alone in the field. God, however, took him from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over his people Israel (2Sa 7:8). God was always with wherever he went (2 Samuel 7:8-9). God removed his enemies. God exalted him. In joy and thanksgiving David composed many songs. He was the singer of songs in Israel.

Look at verses 2-3: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me:" What was so special about David? Many of his natural talents? His fine appearance? His worldly positions? No. It was God who spoke to David. God's word was in David's tongue. David was God's messenger for his people.

Verse 3b-4 say, "When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth." As ruler of Israel, David remembered one word from God. It was godly leadership principle. God wanted David to rule in righteousness and in the fear of God. Righteousness is about right relationship with God. It is what we do before God—although no one else looks at. Those who fear God are humble. Humble leaders are like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning. They are bright and clear. God makes them truly influential leaders in this world.

Look at verses 5: "Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?" From human point of view, David was not a successful father. Neither was he a good husband. Rape, murders, and rebellion occurred in his household. Once this righteous man David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of his faithful general Uriah. For the cover up of his sins David even arranged Uriah to die in the battle. David deceived people for a while but God saw his sin of murder. God's judgment fell. The sword was not departed from his house including Absalom's rebellion. David endured the consequences of his sins in the form of numerous devastating events. However, David's end was not in shame and failures. He repented and moved beyond such failures. He became right with God. His soul was happy. He was satisfied with God's grace and mercy. Then his family was also right with God as well. God's everlasting love sustained him.

Look at verses 6-7: "But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand. Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear: they are burned up where they lie." David encountered many evil men in numerous battles. King Saul constantly hunted him down. On many occasions his enemies--evil men--tried to destroy David. They deceived him. They kept inflicting pains on him. David fought the good fight. He overcame evil with good. In the right time he also saw how God dealt with his enemies one by one.

Here what can we learn from David? The real source of David's greatness is his walk with God. David stayed very close to God. God walked with him as well. God was with him. This is the secret of victory. The real success in this life depends on with whom we walk. Excellent athletes perform because they are trained under great coaches. Great scholars arise through wonderful mentors they associate with. Outstanding spiritual leaders stay close with their superb mentors.

On very personal level, wives influence their husbands most. Jim Paul is happy because his wife Sue walks with him. Sue Paul said that her secret of strength is more than her walk with Jim. It is her walk with God. That's why the Bible says, "Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised"(Prov 31:30).

Recently I spoke with a senior UBF shepherd who is also a senior executive of a global firm. I said, "How do you serve the gospel ministry while discharging demanding responsibilities in the corporate world?" His answer was simple: "Faithful walk with God." In the midst of his busy work, he prays and meditates the word of God. He walks with God. His boss came to respect him for his prayer life—even in his lunch time. With his faithful walk with God, his capacity grows. Those who faithfully walk with God ultimately win. Develop solid spiritual routines. Be steady in spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible studies. Our personal capabilities grow as we stay close to God and depend on him.

Second, David practiced humble leadership (8-17). The remaining chapter is about David's mighty men. The names of top three might men were Josheb-Basshebeth (chief of the three), Eleazar son of Dodai and Shammah son of Agee. Josheb-Basshebeth raised his spear against eight hundred men and killed them in one encounter. Eleazar was also a great warrior who fought hard until his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. Shammah defended alone against the Philistines. All these men did not occupy the top positions in David's army. Yet, they were true leaders.

How did David meet them? They came to him. David met them when he was in distress. After Samuel anointed David as king, he received humble training under King Saul. After his triumph over Goliath David served King Saul. He became very famous in Israel—especially among many young women. Then, King Saul was jealous of David. He tried to kill David in fear again and again. David became a runaway fugitive. With no place to go, one day he made an escape to the cave of Adullam. On hearing about this, his family members came to him. Then, many others joined David—total 400! Who were they? They were in distress (emotionally disturbed) or in debt (financially undisciplined) or discontented (habitually complained). They were 3D (dirty, difficult and dangerous)(1Sa 22:1-4). At this time David was not even free to take care of himself. Even so, David welcomed these needy people while taking care of himself. Under David's care these people were transformed. God blessed David through these people. David was no longer a fugitive. He was a leader of his own army. Thus, David prepared with them for the united kingdom of Israel.

The demanding life styles of UBF leaders are similar to what David experienced in the cave of Adullam. Germany is highly professional society. High level of professional competence requires devotion and hard work. It is challenging to take care of increasing demands at work, family and ministry. As of now, 60%-70% of UBF chapters in Germany and other parts of Europe are mostly small house churches. We thank God for some good house church examples among us. Missionary Peter Oh in Kiel for a long time could not raise up even one mighty man. But he kept praying and devoting to the ministry of God's word. Now a mighty man is growing through his house church. While working on a doctoral degree in theology, he is praying with a vision to pioneer 12 campuses in the Northern Germany. Missionary James Kim in Karlsruhe switched from a Korean to a German firm. He and his wife Esther have served 1:1 ministries

while studying for his MBA degree. Last year Missionary Noah Yoo of Freiburg has experienced a great joy by forming the first mission family. His family serves 1:1 disciple making ministry with hope. These are some of the encouraging examples. However, not all house churches are fruitful. Sometimes we wonder when our house church ministries would ever grow. But the question is not *when* they grow but *how* they grow.

A story in verses 14-18 suggests how David and these men grow together. Once David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” Probably David was homesick. He missed a cup of water from the well in his hometown Bethlehem. At that time the Philistines occupied the town. The three mighty men overheard this and decided to risk their lives. They broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. What was David’s response? Did he thank them and drank the water as was handed to him? No. “Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” David refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. David honored his men. David respected them. David loved them. David valued and loved his men. David did not take advantage of their devotion; instead David honored them before God. This is the way David grew together.

Abraham Lincoln says, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power”. There was a man named Robert Gabriel Mugabe. At the beginning he was a sacrificial and humble leader. As he ruled years as the president he became arbitrary and corrupt. He ruined his once prosperous country into dire poverty. What was the problem? He was holding power for himself. Power must flow. Humble leaders release the power of his people to God—for the larger purpose. Humble leaders do not retain privileges, honor and respect for themselves but pour them out before the Lord. David did not plan to pour out the water before the Lord. It was his spontaneous reaction at the moment. God gave him the heart of a humble leader. God opposes the proud and give grace to the humble (1Peter 5:5). How can house churches grow beyond one or two families? Care for one another deeply? Of course! Most importantly, we must lead people to God. When David poured the water on the ground, he was humbly submitting himself to God and presenting his people to God.

Third, David developed mighty men for God’s purpose (20-39). In the remaining chapter more names of David’s mighty men are recorded. Abishai was Joab’s brother. Benaiah struck down two of Moab’s best men. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. He also struck down a huge Egyptian and snatched the spear from the Egyptian’s hand. Besides these top leaders, other mighty men served David. Only their names are mentioned here. Certainly, these mighty men involved in many battles along with David. Their names are worthy to read: “Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem, 25 Shammah the Harodite, Elikah the Harodite, 26 Helez the Paltite, Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa, 27 Abiezer from Anathoth, Mebunnai the Hushathite, 28 Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite, 29 Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite, Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin, 30 Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash, 31 Abi-Albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite, 32 Eliahba the Shaalbonite, the sons of Jashen, Jonathan 33 son of Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite, 34 Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Macathite, Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, 35 Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, 36 Igal son of Nathan from Zobah, the

son of Hagri”.

How was the list of David’s might men compiled? Certainly, David remembered the names one by one. Notice that Naharai the armor bearer of Joab and Uriah the Hittite are included as mighty men, but not Joab. Joab was the top general in David’s army for many years. He fought in so many battles for victory and achieved it. But he was not one of David’ might men. Why? Joab was his own man. He did not know David’s heart. Instead, he inflicted pains in David’s heart on numerous occasions.

God chose David for mission. His life reveals his mission (1) The union of Israel and Judah, (2) protected his people from his enemy, 3) prosper Israel with blessing from God. David alone could not accomplish all. He devoted to develop the leaders according to their talents. David was really good at slinging a stone, agile to find out the weakest point of enemy and attack it. However, David did not make everyone just like him. David’s mighty men were all unique and even different with their own particular strengths. Some handled spear well, another sword and another with bare hands. Probably, David guided them to find out their own strength and develop it. At the same time, David taught them his bravery and fighting spirit to be mighty men against any enemies. David’s mighty men all learned David’s spirit and faith.

In 2009 there will be European Summer Bible Conference. Many of leaders in Toledo would like to come because it is in Europe. More than one thousand people will attend this conference. In the course of preparing for this conference God will increase our personal capabilities to serve. Developing mature co-work relationships among Korean missionaries and German native leaders require humble leadership. What is the purpose of this conference. It is to call and develop leaders. Most of all, we pray that God may multiply the combined capabilities of all Europe UBF--most of all with its good influence around the world.

The secret of continuous growth is obvious. Number of leaders must grow. Leaders must grow up. For this we all practice our basics: (1) Each of us walks with God and strengthen our spiritual routines. Why do this? We must never forget what we are to become. Each of us is to become a blessing. We must become might men and women of God. Never give up this prayer topic. By the grace of God we live and die as mighty men and women of God. (2) Be humble before God. Humble people see God. Humble people honor God. Humble people present others to God. (3) Develop leaders. Serve them and develop them as mighty men and women of God. Develop their spirit and capacity to fight the good fight together.

These days Margaret Thatcher (she is 82 years old) is suffering from Alzheimer disease. Her memory functions do not work well. She cannot give any speech in public. The point is this. Everyone will have his or her last days. We may consider our last words now. What would be our last words? Our songs of joy include the names of mighty men and women we remember. This is the end of the matter. Walk with God—to the end. Work for Christ and his kingdom. In this way, our last words will be as joyful and glorious like those of David.