

“End of life—blessing and revenge”
1 Kings 2:1-12

Introduction

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

*There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.*

2. **“There is a time to be born and a time to die.”** So, when were you born? What was the date? And that makes you how old?

We all know exactly when and where we were born. Some of us know the hour and the minute. Yet, not one of us knows when or where we will die. Although, we’ve all thought about it. In our imagination we will be very happy, very healthy and very old; we will go to sleep one night, silently and comfortably die during the night and happily wake up in heaven. But, that is not the way most people die.

Many die young. Many die in times, places and ways they could never have predicted or imagined. We have little more choice of when and where we will die than we chose when and where we were born. The only certainty is that as we all were born so also we all will die. As the Old Testament sage wrote in Ecclesiastes, *“there is a time to be born and a time to die.”*

Time to die

1 Kings 2:1

1. King David was 70 years old and his time had come.

1 Kings 2:1

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

2. The way the Bible writes the words gives the impression that the day of death was predetermined. That’s sort of what my mother used to teach me. I remember her getting on planes and saying in a voice-too-loud that all the other passengers were blessed to have her on board because it wasn’t her God-appointed time to die so that guaranteed their safety.

Pope Benedict has repeatedly called for Christians and others to respect human life from “conception to natural death.” Our culture often resists death. When Americans on Medicare die 77% of lifetime Medicare expenditures are incurred during the last year of life.¹ But, no matter what we do and how much we spend we are all like David and have our time to die.

3. **David knew death was near.** His final words are carefully chosen, remembered and recorded. They make us wonder what we would say if we knew death was near.

Words of blessing

1 Kings 2:2-4

1. 1 Kings 2:2-4

“I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’”

2. **What good advice and blessing for a father to speak to his son.** Good counsel for us all! David says to *“be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires.”* At first glance this almost sounds like he is saying to be tough but that’s really not the point. David tells his son to be strong for God, be a man of God and do what God tells you to do.

David has lived his way and lived God’s way and he’s declaring that God’s way is always better. David was strong, godly and obedient when he faced Goliath and took him down with his first shot. David was weak, ungodly and disobedient when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered to cover his sin. David knew both ways from experience and tells Solomon and us to go God’s way.

3. **Many of us aren’t very good at following wise advice.** We see something totally foolish on TV and are told “don’t try this at home”---don’t jump off the roof; don’t put your tongue on a frozen post; don’t aim bottle rockets at your friend. We know it’s good advice. We know there may be terrible consequences if we don’t follow the advice. And, we do it anyway. Call it crazy. Call it stupid. Call it sin. We ignore wise advice and do it anyway.

It is very, very, very, very good advice to live God’s way. *“Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements.”* To find out what are God’s ways, decrees, commands, laws and requirements just read the Bible. God tells us how to live in everything from relationships to money, sex, politics, prayer and worship. For many of us, including Solomon, the challenge is not to know what God wants but to be strong and do what God says.

4. **David gave very good death-bed advice.** It was good for God’s sake but also very practical. Live God’s way *“so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you*

go.” We should do what is right because it is right whether we prosper or not. Faithfulness to God is the best way to live whether we have success or not. But, God’s way is also the best route to prosperity in life. The good life is the God-life. The happy life is the God-life. God’s way is always the best way.

5. **If you were next to your father’s death bed and his last words were “live for God,” what would you do?** And, when you die, what words of advice do you want your children to most remember and follow?

1 Kings 1:2-3

“I am about to go the way of all the earth,” David said. “So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go....”

Words of revenge

1 Kings 2:5-9

1. **I kind of wish that David had said what he said, shut-up and died.** But, he kept talking with words that could have been left unsaid.

1 Kings 2:5-9

“Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me—what he did to the two commanders of Israel’s armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.

“But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

“And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord: ‘I will not put you to death by the sword.’ But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.”

2. **The good news is that David wants to give practical advice to strengthen his son’s position as the new king.** The bad news is that David wants his son to settle old political scores and control the kingdom even after he is dead.
3. **Joab was the general of David’s army.** He has made David’s reign possible and successful. They were life-long political allies. But, Joab had done some things that David just couldn’t forget or forgive. Joab had murdered two other officers in Israel’s army (Abner and Amasa) and David had let him get away with it. To get even he advises Solomon to make sure Joab suffers when he dies.
- I suppose that this was to warn Solomon about the political risks with Joab and the army but it was also a terrible burden to put on the new king. A better leader would have dealt with Joab himself rather than leave a mess for the next administration.
- Shimei cursed David to his face when David was scrambling to deal with an insurrection led by his own son Absalom.** At the time David was gracious and

officially forgiving. David was a model of how to deal with out-of-control political opponents. But, Shimei insulted, offended and wounded David in a way that he could not forget. Among his dying words was the request that Solomon get even.

This was the worst of politics. It's what continues hatred in family feuds, Middle East disputes and Congressional votes. It was David at his worst.

Barzillai was an ally David liked. He helped David when most others turned against him. He was generous with resources that helped David survive and succeed. So, David told Solomon to be generous to the descendants of Barzillai by inviting them to eat at the king's table (which may be a way of saying that they should all be given government pensions—sort of an ancient equivalent to today's Washington “earmarks”).

4. I don't want to be too critical of David's dying people list for his son Solomon.

But I do think he was trying to do something that many attempt in later years—to control the behavior of the next generation. Leaders of Christian colleges and churches write rules to make sure that future generations are orthodox. Grandparents sign elaborate wills and trusts to guarantee that their cabin stays in the family. Business owners have all sorts of rules to make sure that the company is run in the future the way they ran it in the past. What David said before he died is not unlike what lots of people still do today.

David's first advice was his best advice. He could have stopped when he told his son to walk in the ways of the Lord. Because, if Solomon fully followed God he would know what to do with Joab, Shimei and Barzillai. And, if Solomon chose not to follow God then David's requests about his enemies and friends wouldn't make much difference anyway.

The best gift we can give future generations is for them to obey all that the Bible says and to follow Jesus with all their hearts. If the next generation loves and obeys Jesus they will do the right thing with the college, the church, the cabin and the business.

“So be strong...and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements...so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go....”

Death of David

1 Kings 2:10-12

1. David spoke his final advice.

1 Kings 2:10-12

Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. He had reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

2. He died 3,000 years ago and he is the cover story of the December 2010 issue of the 4th largest circulation magazine in the United States (*National Geographic*).

David's name is second only to Jesus in biblical frequency.

3. David's sins were too many and too big. But, his heart for God never quit. I wish he'd been better than he was. I wish he had been perfect. But, the truth is that he was like a lot of us—we want to do what is right even when we don't; we are

embarrassingly contradictory; we really do have hearts for God. And, the very good news is that God is loving and forgiving—God sees the sins of David and us and has a heart for us anyway. He makes us better than we would otherwise have been. He blesses us and lifts us up. And so, we remember David not for his worst but for his best.

Conclusion

- 1. Kyle Rote, Sr., was an All-American football player for Southern Methodist University in 1950.** In 1951 he was the #1 First Round Draft Choice for the National Football League. He played his entire 11-year career for the New York Giants and was on the 1957 NFL Championship team. He was team captain for 10 of his 11 years in New York. After the NFL he had a second career as a sportscaster for NBC. Kyle Rote died in Baltimore on August 15, 2002, at the age of 74. After his death his son, Kyle Rote, Jr., said that the greatest honor paid to his father was not all the titles, trophies and awards—the greatest honor was that 14 of his father’s teammates named their sons Kyle.²
- 2. David killed a giant, won wars, united a nation, founded a dynasty and wrote half of the Bible’s psalms.** Perhaps the greatest honor is that millions of parents have named their sons David. No, the greatest honor is that the first line of the New Testament begins, “*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David*” (Matthew 1:1).

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¹ JOHN M. LUCE and GORDON D. RUBENFELD, “Can Health Care Costs Be Reduced by Limiting Intensive Care at the End of Life?” *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, Volume 165, Number 6, March 2002, pages 750-754.

² *Kansas City Star*, August 16, 2002. Also, background and statistical information from Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyle_Rote).