

## 2 Samuel 23:1-7 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### The Last Words of David

**23** Now these are the last words of David:

The oracle of David, son of Jesse,  
the oracle of the man whom God exalted,<sup>[a]</sup>  
the anointed of the God of Jacob,  
the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>The spirit of the LORD speaks through me,  
his word is upon my tongue.

<sup>3</sup>The God of Israel has spoken,  
the Rock of Israel has said to me:

One who rules over people justly,  
ruling in the fear of God,

<sup>4</sup>is like the light of morning,  
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

<sup>5</sup>Is not my house like this with God?  
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,  
ordered in all things and secure.

Will he not cause to prosper  
all my help and my desire?

<sup>6</sup>But the godless are<sup>[b]</sup> all like thorns that are thrown away;  
for they cannot be picked up with the hand;

<sup>7</sup>to touch them one uses an iron bar  
or the shaft of a spear.

And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

## John 18:33-38a

<sup>33</sup>Then Pilate entered the headquarters<sup>[a]</sup> again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" <sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."<sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."<sup>38</sup> Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

**November 22, 2015**

**2 Samuel 23:1-7; John 18:33-38a**

**King's Dominion**

**Kerra Becker English**

Richmond had a characteristically hot and humid summer in 1977. How do I know? My first ever trip to Kings Dominion was that year. The park hadn't been open very long, but my Aunt Lannie lived in Fredericksburg, so that was a way for my Dad to see his aunt and get a family vacation in at the same time. My sister was barely a toddler, but I was big enough to ride a few of the family rides with my Dad. We stood in long lines, sweating, and hoping for a breeze from the electric fans placed along the line route. We would go back just a few more times before my parents decided they preferred going to the beach in the summer. No one in my immediate family became a thrill ride enthusiast, so going to the park gave way to other things.

And yet, Kings Dominion has always been a great memory, a reminder of my childhood awe and wonder, when a theme park like that can be downright magical. Its name, however, is a bit unusual. Drawn from two sources – it comes from a relationship with its sister park “Kings Island,” and the nickname of the state in which it is located “Old Dominion,” thus “Kings Dominion.” As far as I know, the park is not ruled by a monarch, and its dominion only extends about as far as the asphalt slab it sits on will allow. It's just another amusement park – like Busch Gardens, Dollywood, or the big papa of them all that is run by that mouse and draws millions to either Orlando or Anaheim year after year.

Nevertheless I am quite grateful for our nearby amusement park, the one with a personal history, the one that just maybe drew me a little bit closer to the center of the universe, which

also happens to be the one with a crazy name that got me asking a few strange questions about the scripture texts for this week.

Just what is a King's Dominion? David was a King and today we read his last words about hoping to have been one who ruled with justice and lived into this everlasting covenant he once made with God.

What is a King's Dominion? Jesus was accused of being a King, and we get to overhear this strange conversation with his accuser, Pilate, about what kind of Kingdom he imagines it to be.

So if Kings do exercise dominion in God's sight. I find myself asking...

What kind of King does God choose to love? AND

What exactly is the scope of their dominion?

Once the Hebrew people had made their passage out of slavery and settled in the Promised Land, they started to see themselves as a nation rather than the collection of family tribes they had been. Nations at that time were known for their rule by kings. So like a kid seeing toy advertisements before Christmas, it didn't take long for them to want what everyone else already had – a King. The scripture reads as though they pestered and pestered until God relented and gave them exactly what they'd asked for. Saul was their first King, but it didn't take long before David seemed to become the favorite one.

We know some of the pieces of David's story. It reads as the typical hero's tale. As a small kid, he bests a giant with his slingshot. He is attributed with writing beautiful prayers and playing music to accompany those prayers. He lusts after a beautiful woman and has the power

at his fingertips to get her husband out of the way so he can take her as his bride. He is mighty in battle, faithful to God (mostly), and actually acknowledges his own mistakes with grief and transformation. In his own last words, he says, “The Spirit of God speaks through me.” He believed, really believed that he was God’s anointed monarch. We find that a little disconcerting in our Presidential hopefuls, but for the King, it was a matter of utmost importance to be the designated person who received God’s favor.

Jesus, on the other hand, was a reluctant King. He didn’t want such a title. His own people were using that title as a jab, more than as an honor. And when Pilate accuses him of being a King, he only says, “You say that I am.” Jesus can be described by the actions of his life as a prophet, a sage, a teacher, a rabbi, a miracle worker, or a political rabble-rouser, and therefore he has been known by a bunch of different titles, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Prince of Peace, and King of the Jews. Messiah even means God’s anointed one. Sounds a lot like he resembles David as his long lost great, great, great, great – however many greats it is – grandson.

Both David’s political reign and Jesus’ other-worldly reign were divinely appointed. They were kings, not just because of bloodline, but because of heavenly decree. That’s pretty awesome in the striking sense of the word. They were both promised eternal kingdoms, though David may have seen his promise more as a blessing of sons to rule the throne; whereas Jesus identifies that his kingdom is not of this world.

So their dominion is a bit unusual as well. David had territories to be sure, but both of them had an understanding that the whole world and everything in it, and everyone yet to come would be touched by the kind of reign they were granted. I’m all for making a mark on the

world, and I hope that I am able to do that in my own small but substantial way, but this, THIS is a grandiosity I can't really imagine. I don't generally operate on the scope of the entire world, AND all eras yet to come. Everlasting covenants; eternal hope; and everyone, everyone will be touched by this king's dominion? That's pretty powerful stuff.

I haven't come to any real answers as to what that all means, but I do have a lot of interesting questions rolling around in my mind on this. Our world keeps piling up with situation upon situation that requires the kind of leaders who will do exactly what inspired David to be the best possible king he could be. We need leaders who will rule with justice and an eye toward God. We need national rulers who do their jobs so well that they could be described as a ray of sunlight on a cloudless morning. We could use a few more policy makers living in the kingdom that is not of this world to bring a better sense of God's hope to the broken and hurting places. I'm just saying.

If we had legitimate Kings with a better sense of the Dominion they exercised, would we be better off? I have no earthly idea. What I do know is that for the things that take a royal kind of precedence in my own life, I might want to have the sense in which God is actively working in my own little dominion to make a difference. Here's what I mean by that. I'm a little concerned that everyone seems to be taking up every single cause that comes across their favorite news channel, inbox or social media feed. I'm pained about the refugees too. And I want better care for Homeless Veterans. But I have also been pained about young black men who are treated like target practice or just another paycheck for our "for profit" prison system. And I hate to see good cops like our steady police force in Ashland compared to those precincts that have major issues with racism and seeming to be above the law themselves. I would love to do more to fight debilitating diseases and work for the rights for all people. And I'd love to be able to adopt every

adorable dog BARK sends me pictures of. BUT I KNOW I CAN'T DO IT ALL! My kingdom is not equipped to handle all that.

My kingdom is tiny and it is most certainly of this world. It has a very narrow scope of authority, and its dominion doesn't have much reach. But I am constantly amazed at what can happen when I focus primarily on those things that God has called me to do. When I do work in my own kingdom, or queendom as it may be, I sometimes even surprise myself with how the possibilities come to amazing fruition! David's assurance and Jesus' awareness of God's love for him – maybe that's what made all the difference in the world. We just don't like it much when our politicians try to win votes that way. We are skeptical of those who will tell you that they are called by God to one of the most powerful leadership positions in the world, but as Joe Biden said when he chose not to run for President, "if you don't feel called to that job, there's no way to be able to do it. That's true – mostly – in any situation. Our abilities are enhanced when we do exactly what we are made to do, no more, and no less.

I don't want to appear cold or calloused about the atrocities of our world. I am not. All those things and more NEED people who find their calling to help. I just wonder if we do more good by recognizing our own delight in the things we are supposed to do because God sent us here for such a time as this. My king's dominion moment, therefore, is a reminder to be the ruler of my own environment in whatever way I am being led to do so. I pray that I will do so well. As you discover what your king's dominion involves, may it be a delightful roller coaster of an adventure for 40 years or more. Since we've been living here, Kings Dominion turned 40, and both Virginia parks have offered incentives for those of us who went as kids to come back. We come back to the things and places and people who move us, who make us be more authentically who we are. Blessings to each of you as you live out your callings. Amen.