

Behold the King: A Blinding Light  
2 Samuel 23:1-7  
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Biblical News Flash! King David was bald! King David was bald! Why else would today's passage describe him as a blinding light, as someone who is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. You know that kind of light. It's the first thing in the morning, driving due east, too lazy to scrape all the frost off the car window kind of blinding light, the kind that even aviator sunglasses can't entirely deflect. It's the kind of light that is so bright that you can see it even with your eyes closed, especially when you desperately want to fall asleep and can only do so in total darkness. You know that kind of light. It's the kind that emanates from the head of the bald guy leaning over to tie his shoe. There's no doubt in my mind that King David was bald.

Through the centuries, bald men have had to come up with comebacks to such vicious attacks. Of course I've told you about my Biblical favorite in 2 Kings chapter 2 when the prophet Elisha calls down two she-bears to maul the forty-two boys who taunted him for being bald. And then there's the retort of the follicly challenged that the higher the forehead, the greater the wisdom and so here is even more proof that David was bald. We need look no further than the book of Proverbs to see that David was wise, since it says there that "the fear of the Lord is

the beginning of wisdom,” and it says here that the ideal king, King David as he describes himself, ruled “in the fear of the Lord.” And since his sense of the fear of the Lord was profound enough that he should be considered a great king, it follows logically that he was very wise, and therefore, very bald. And if that’s true, than certainly the wisest man of all, our friend Jesus, must have been the baldest of all. How’s *that* for Biblical prooftexting?

These are King David’s final words, and he pulls no punches in announcing that he is the King of kings, favored by God with the divine word on his tongue, exalted, anointed, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel. David was nothing if not modest. He is described with those poetic words about light, compared to the sun and all its power. Behold the King: a blinding light, capable like the light of day of dispelling fear of darkness, reliable like the sun coming up every morning, making visible the invisible, giving power to see the unseen. Yes, King David is blinding and dazzling, but what makes him so is not his good looks, his military prowess, or his longevity as King, ruling for more than 40 years, but most importantly that he was “ruling in the fear of God,” ruling justly the people of Israel.

You see that is the criteria by which Kings are judged. That old Pharaoh, King of Egypt, was a powerful ruler, commanding unbeatable armies with more horses and chariots than you could count, but he lacked what would have made him a great king when he refused Moses’ request to “let my people go.” Of all the kings of Israel and Judah who would follow David and his son Solomon, of all of

them, only three are described as “walking in all the way of his father David,” which is code for being a good king, not because they failed to lead the armies of Israel to victory or the nation to economic prosperity, but because they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, building monuments to other gods and failing to heed the prophet’s message to “seek good and not evil, that you may live,” in other words to live as if they knew that God was God and they weren’t.

That idea, knowing that God is God and you are not, is maybe the best definition of that scary phrase, “the fear of the Lord.” The fear of the Lord is not about living in fear, but living in awe, not about walking around wondering when God will jump out from behind a rock to scare you out of your wits, but marveling at the rock itself and your own inability to make it. The word “fear” here is better understood as “awe,” meaning that jaw dropping sense of awesomeness or wonder you experience when you come face to face with something so amazing or divine that it seems too perfect or too untouchable or too indescribable. The fear of the Lord is that profound understanding of the difference between you and God, a way of living as if you know how awesome God really is.

And so David ruled in the fear of the Lord, and for doing so, he is rewarded both with poetry that describes him as perfect light, and also with a promise, a covenant, that one of his descendants would always sit on the throne. “Your house,” God said to David, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” This divine promise,

this covenant, is what David is recalling in his last words when he says, “Is not my house like this with God?” that is, isn’t it like perfect light, “For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.” With these last words, David is making sure that everyone knows he ruled “in the fear of the Lord,” and ruled justly.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church’s year, the final Lord’s day of its calendar. Christ the King Sunday celebrates one of the three traditional roles of Jesus Christ. In these roles of Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus Christ makes known God’s justice, God’s compassion, and God’s power. Why we don’t have a Christ the Prophet Sunday, or a Christ the Priest Sunday, I have no idea, but for some reason, the church saw fit to celebrate Christ’s role of King with a special day. Of course we know that Jesus was no earthly king, that his crown was of thorns, not gold and jewels, that we must wait to see his throne in heaven, that he wielded power in ways very unlike the kings of his own time. So why do we say that Christ was King? Well, we do so in part because of the way Jesus’ followers interpreted his life with respect to the covenant with David. In Jesus Christ, the early church saw the rightful heir to the throne of David. In Jesus Christ, the world experienced someone who, like David, ruled “in the fear of the Lord.” We should not find it surprising to hear Jesus describing himself as “the light of the world” after we hear how David describes himself in these his final

words. From the first perfect king to the last perfect king, God has been faithful to the covenant established with David.

Next Sunday begins the season of Advent when we will hear again of the prophecies about a Messiah, about the ancestry of Jesus, about the similarities between Jesus and David, and they all stem from this covenant made with David, on the basis of his ruling “in the fear of the Lord.” Keeping in mind all that Jesus did, or didn’t do, as King, it is easy to see that through all the years of exile by the Babylonians, and all the years of occupation by the Romans, the criteria for the perfect King of Israel never changed. Being guided by that jaw dropping awe, that knowledge that God is God, remained the most important and obvious way of discerning who is a good king. A simple reading of the Gospel reveals that Jesus lived his life “in the fear of the Lord,” and ruled justly as a result. No wonder Jesus was recognized as a King.

Of course we don’t have Kings anymore that function like kings in Biblical times. And the fate of the nation does not rest on the faithfulness of its leaders, as it did in the time of the Kings of Israel and Judah. But that does not change the fact that those who would be recognized as good rulers, good leaders, good parents or bosses, yea, even good spouses, listen up Mary White and Robert Walters, would do well to reflect on the criteria by which Jesus and David were deemed good kings, or leaders. It was evidenced, and still is, I believe, by whether or not one lives “in the fear of the Lord” and rules or acts justly accordingly. The task then

becomes knowing how to translate “the fear of the Lord” into everyday activities that give testimony to the fact of one’s fear of the Lord. What deeds do we do that might be like those recorded about David that give witness to his right to the title of the perfect King?

Well, for Christians, the obvious place to start is with the teachings of Christ. To what extent do we reflect faithfulness to Christ’s teachings? In what ways does our experience of knowing that “God is God and I’m not,” shape how we love God and love neighbor? Or to put it in reverse, to what extent does our love of God and love of neighbor reveal our sense of “the fear of the Lord?” Do we raise our children, spend our money, brush our teeth, give of our time, in such a way that others would say of us, “Whoa, now there goes someone who is in awe of how great their God is, who has a sense of the distance between heaven and earth.”

To be sure, there are times when we make mistakes, when we err, when we lead or follow contrary to the fear of God, when we behave unjustly, or simply unkindly. There is no denying that. We’re only human after all, eh? But it is part of our faith to believe that our God is awesome enough to overcome whatever shortcomings we may have, and that even when we do stumble, there is forgiveness to be found. After all, David sent Uriah the Hittite to his death so he could steal his wife, but still found forgiveness and favor from God. And somehow, even though generations of Kings were evil in the sight of the Lord,

God was still faithful to the covenant with David, bringing another perfect king to that family's throne, the one we celebrate on Christ the King Sunday.

The final part of this sermon is directed toward Mary and Robert, but the rest of you may eavesdrop if you like. Tonight you may feel like the King and Queen of the world, and you should! It's a night to celebrate, and we are so pleased to be able to celebrate with you. But a marriage is no more characterized by the wedding, than a monarch's reign is by the coronation. Tonight may feel like the culmination of a lot of hope, planning, and hard work, but it is really only the beginning, the beginning of your common hope, planning and hard work, together with God, as you live out together the "fear of the Lord." Do so remembering Christ is king of each of your lives, and your life together; that when you stumble, Christ will hold you up; and that you have the best example of covenant faithfulness to each other in God's love for you in Jesus Christ.

Behold the King: a blinding light. Jesus is blinding but what makes him so is not his good looks, his military prowess, or his longevity as King, since he wasn't one, but that he was "ruling in the fear of God," ruling justly. Jesus is the perfect light of the world cast upon each of us because God keeps God's promises. May God bless each of us, and this church, and this couple, as we try to be faithful, as we try to live "in the fear of the Lord." Amen.