

# Calum Cameron - 1 Kings 1 - Who will be King?

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're now going to, for a short time, just look at some of these words we read in the Book of First Kings, chapter one. See if you have a Bible, you may want to have it open, First Kings, chapter one.

I want to start off with a confession I have to make about the Book of Kings. I think it is a difficult book. It is a book that is not easy to sit down and read.

And I don't think that I am alone in thinking that. Certainly I think it is one of those books if you just sit down and try to plow through it, it is hard to take away instant application for your own life.

It is the kind of book that when we read we sometimes feel the temptation to jump to a Sam or to a Gospel or to an epistle. Because for some reason we think that these are more theological than the sort of the history that we find in Kings.

Even as I was looking at this opening chapter and thinking about today, I was having horrible flashbacks to my Old Testament exams and having to memorise dates and battles and lists of obscure Kings.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] But the Book of Kings, I think, when you get into it, when you read it in light of God's redemptive purposes in history, the Book of Kings has so much to offer us.

So for those reasons, before we jump into the narrative in chapter one, I just want to begin by saying a few things by way of introduction to the Book of Kings. And I want to do that by just asking three quick questions.

What type of book is the Book of Kings? Secondly, what is the message of the Book of Kings? So what's going on? What's being communicated by God through this book?

And then thirdly, in what way is the Book of Kings relevant for us today? So what type of book is the Book of Kings? Well, you might know as I'm referring to it as one book, First and Second Kings.

Originally in the Hebrew, it's taken together as one unit. It's only in our English translations that we make a distinction. And the Book of Kings at a very simple level is a Book of History.

[ 2 : 1 5 ] It records a 450-year period from the end of King David to the exile of God's people in Babylon. So essentially it is a history of God's people.

That's why in our Bibles we have it in here amongst the history books. Many people today will say that the Old Testament is just a bunch of fictional stories. It's a bunch of myths. It's just examples for how we should live that none of these things actually happened.

But the author of Kings clearly wants to give us an accurate historical record of actual things that actually happened in our world.

And that's important. We are not reading fairy tales. But it is so much more than just historical record. Kings is so much more than just a list of kings and dates and battles.

In fact, in the original Hebrew, the Book of Kings is not in with the historical books. It's placed in amongst the former prophets. And there's good reason for that, I think.

[ 3 : 21 ] Those books underline the urgency of listening to God's voice, of listening to the prophetic message. Sinclair Ferguson observes that there is more than one kind of prophecy in the Bible.

There is more than one way that God communicates to his people. Sometimes in the Old Testament he does it by raising up a prophet, a man who is God's mouthpiece, a person who will declare the word of God to the nation of Israel.

But there are different kinds of prophecy. And in the case of kings, it's not so much a mystical foretelling of the future as an analysis of stuff that's happened, of real events, with a view to helping God's people to live faithfully in the present.

And I think that's a really helpful way to understand the Book of Kings. It's written to a people who are in exile.

It's not history written down for the sake of history. It's history to make a point. It's not the kind of history we would expect to find in a school textbook.

[ 4 : 31 ] Kings is what is often referred to as redemptively selective history. And what that means is that God has included every word in here as part of his overall message as part of his overall word.

So first of all, what kind of book is Kings? It's history, yes. But it's more than that. Kings is redemptively selective, prophetic history.

Secondly, what is the message of Kings? Well, throughout the book I think it becomes clear that despite the fewer exceptions like King David and King Josiah, the human kings that we are presented with are generally pretty terrible guys.

They're pretty awful kings. They are people who they get progressively worse and worse in turning God's people away from worship of God, of worship of Yahweh, to worship of idols, to living immoral lives.

However, the message of Kings is also that despite all of these shortcomings, God does not forget his covenant promises.

[ 5 : 39 ] So we are left with the urgent sense that Israel needs a better king. Israel needs someone greater. That the true hope for Israel is a new David, is a better David.

And then we see in the New Testament, in the person of Jesus Christ, that he is the true son of David. He comes as the true king. He has come to establish a kingdom that will never end.

God is a God who keeps his covenant promises. And then thirdly, and briefly, why is Kings relevant for us today? And I think that is a hugely important question.

Many Christians, and I include myself in this, find that when we sit down and we read Kings, it sometimes feels dry. It sometimes feels dusty. It feels like a lot of names and dates and events that are happened thousands of years ago.

But this book is full of stories that mirror our own world in so many ways. One scholar, a guy called Paul House, he said that situations such as war, poverty, political corruption, oppression, these are permanent symptoms of the human condition.

[ 6 : 55 ] These are things that don't go away with time. Our sinfulness means that no matter how much our world might move on, no matter how much our world might progress, we are still plagued by these tragic circumstances.

In the same way, the faithfulness, the loyalty and the obedience which are key throughout the book of Kings, they remain today as marks of God's people. And on top of all that, I think crucial biblical doctrines like God's sovereignty, God's redemption, His wrath, His love, His character, they permeate through the book of Kings.

I think we also have to remember when we come to books that we think are difficult that Paul in 2 Timothy reminds us that all scripture, every page is given by the inspiration of God.

Literally, he says, it's God breathed. And Paul says, therefore, it's useful for four things. It's here to teach us. It's here to reprove us.

It's here, he says, to correct us and to equip us for every good work. Now all four of those things apply to the book of Kings. We have to view it as part of God's word, which teaches us, which reproves us, which corrects us, which equips us.

[ 8 : 17 ] It has something in here to challenge us where we need to be challenged. It has something to encourage us today where we need encouragement. And it also reveals more and more to us of God's great plan for redemption, what he's working out through history for the salvation of his people.

So just with those things in mind, let's now focus in on chapter one and hopefully we'll see how God is speaking into our own lives through the book of Kings.

Now, first Kings chapter one is it's a long narrative. It's far too long to read all the way through. But the basic plot is this, that King David is approaching the end of his life.

He's old, he's weak, and it's not long now until someone is going to have to replace him. Solomon is the son, the son of David that God has chosen to be the next king.

But this fellow, Adonijah, David's eldest living son, he takes this opportunity while David is still alive and while he's weak to crown himself, to take the throne for himself.

[ 9 : 23 ] He goes on to gather some support from some key influential people like Joab. Joab was the commander of David's army and Abiathar, the priest. These are people who are influential and important, people who have been with David since the beginning.

Adonijah then goes and throws this elaborate feast and he makes all these great sacrifices in a show of religious piety, but as the story goes on, we see God uses Nathan and he uses Bathsheba to alert David to the danger and David preemptively crowned Solomon King and Adonijah's plan crumbles.

Now, why is this story here? I think that's a good question to begin with, with any part of God's word. Why is this story here? God has included every word for a reason.

Before we're on, we refer to kings as redemptively selective history and that's what it is. This text is not here just to tell us about stuff that happened a long time ago.

It's here to speak into our own lives, to speak into our own experience, to challenge us, to encourage us, to reveal more to us of what God is doing in redemption.

[ 10 : 34 ] So with that in mind, I want to consider two brief things about Adonijah, particularly in the opening verses of the chapter and hopefully we'll then see how Adonijah provides us with a window into our own hearts, into our own souls today.

So first of all, we're going to look at Adonijah's ambition. We see that the passage begins by telling us that King David is old, King David has advanced in years, he's grown weak.

Not only that, he is struggling to get warm, struggling to get warm despite his servant's best attempts to find him the ancient equivalent of an electric blanket, a hot water bottle.

Some scholars seem to think that David is suffering from some kind of degenerative heart condition and we're not going to explore these verses in any great detail but I think it's safe to say from them that it's clear that David is not the king he once was.

David is no longer strong. This is someone who won great battles, who fought with lions and bears. David took on a giant. He conquered kingdoms.

[ 11 : 42 ] But the picture being painted right at the beginning of Kings is that David's, even David's body, failed him. In a great reminder of human frailty, even the best human king cannot reign forever.

Peter said this in Acts chapter two, fellow Israelites, I can tell you with confidence that the patriarch David died and was buried and his tomb is here to this day. Now that raises the question for us, the decline of David.

Who is going to be king? Who will be king after David? Who is going to succeed him? What is going to happen to God's kingdom after his chosen king has gone?

Think for a moment about how kings were put in place in Israel. They were men that were first and foremost chosen by God and then that choice was confirmed through the ministry of a prophet.

See in the book of Samuel, neither Saul nor David initially sought the throne for themselves. God told Samuel to select these men for the task.

[ 12 : 47 ] And the Lord had told David that the next king was not to be his eldest living son, Adonijah, but instead his son Solomon. But we read in the first part of verse five that Adonijah comes along, he exalts himself, he puts himself forward and he says, I will be king.

I think in that one sentence, we gain such an incredible insight into Adonijah's heart, into his character. And I think it draws attention to one of the greatest issues in our own lives, in the lives of God's people today.

Do we accept the king that God has established, the king that God has chosen, or do we think that we know better? Do we want to king ourselves?

It's a central theme in the book of kings. It's a central theme, in fact, throughout the whole of scripture. If you go back to the very beginning to Genesis, where the first two human beings, the first act of sin was essentially this.

The two beings saying to God, I will be king. I value my own authority above your authority. The problem with Adonijah is that he won't accept God's choice.

[ 14 : 01 ] He won't bow to God's will. The book of kings is often described as the battle between God's sovereignty on the one hand and human pride on the other.

And I think right at the beginning, Adonijah, the first story we get is a prime example of that. He says, I will be king.

See Adonijah's ambition comes from the fact that at the heart of it, we see he was living for himself. He says Adonijah exalted himself.

His view of life was utterly self-centered. He had a lust for power, for praise, and for glory.

And so often in certain ways we can be a bit like Adonijah. We find ourselves living for self. The natural human inclination is to want to put ourselves on the throne.

[ 14 : 59 ] We want to be the ones who are in control of our lives. Part of that is our world. It's driven by consumerism, by the desire for self-advancement, by the desire for self-happiness, and by self-confidence.

Our own individual pleasure and comfort and security is given the highest priority. Paul Tripp, an American pastor, speaks about this being torn between the kingdom of self and the kingdom of God.

As a Christian, he says, in love, God works to dent and to deface my glory so that his glory would be my delight. He says he plunders my kingdom so that his kingdom would be my joy.

He crushes my crown under his feet so that I would quest to be a good ambassador and not crave to be a king. See, as people, as Christians, we are still imperfect.

We are still flawed and tend to be inconsistent. And we will face that temptation, that tension in our lives between exalting the self and exalting God.

[ 16 : 14 ] Phil Reichen put it like this. He said, we become so consumed with building our own little kingdoms that we fail to find our rightful place in the true kingdom of God.

And Adonijah, I think, is a great reminder to us that we must recognize God's kingly authority in Christ Jesus.

We must exalt him and not ourselves. In life, we must place him at the center. We must bow before God's sovereignty, God's chosen king.

We have to ask ourselves constantly, are we submitting to God's kingly rule, or do we prefer to exalt ourselves, to place ourselves on the throne and say, I will be king?

So that's Adonijah's ambition. He exalted himself saying, I will be king. Want to look briefly now at Adonijah's qualifications. We're told in verse six that he was a very handsome man.

[ 17 : 13 ] He clearly looked the part of everything that a king should be, externally, humanly speaking. And I think the author of Kings is telling us this for a reason.

He's reminding us that Adonijah is doing exactly what Absalom did before him. Absalom was Adonijah's older brother. And we read in Samuel that he died in his own failed rebellion.

But listen to what second Samuel tells us about Absalom. Chapter 14 verse 25 says, in all Israel, there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom.

From the top of his head to the sole of his foot, there was no blemish in him. See, as human beings, we are so quick to judge everything by the external appearance.

We instantly evaluate a person by their looks, by the way they dress, by the way they speak, even sometimes where they come from. We make judgments on all these things, perhaps without even realizing it.

[ 18 : 17 ] Both Absalom and Adonijah, they both serve as powerful reminders that the external can be deceiving. Remember in first Samuel chapter 16, when God is choosing the next king through Samuel, and he's come to David, Samuel arrives and he sees Eliab, his impressive looking older brother.

And he thought, surely the Lord's anointed stands here. But first Samuel 16 says that the Lord said to Samuel, do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him.

For the Lord sees not as man sees, man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart. Now in our passage here, not only does Adonijah have the right external appearance of a king, but he also seems to have the right status.

Verse 6 goes on to tell us that not only was he handsome, not only did he look the part, he was also next in line. At this point Adonijah is David's eldest surviving son.

Now to us today that might not mean a lot, but back then that was extremely important. See the firstborn male in the family was the prime inheritor. The firstborn male in terms of royalty would be the next king.

[ 19 : 38 ] The crown would automatically pass down to the eldest son when the monarch died. So on the surface Adonijah looks like the right person.

When we see that as the passage goes on he does more and more to cultivate this image. He puts on this great display of power. He prepares all of these chariots and these horses and 50 men to go before him.

He gathers all of these important people in a great display of influence. He makes all these elaborate sacrifices in a great display of religious piety.

He hosts feasts in a great display of wealth and generosity. See in other words Adonijah is doing what many of us do on a regular basis.

He is cultivating an outward appearance. We get so caught up with that. We get so prone to creating an image of ourselves, a persona as it were, to show others that we are better than we actually are.

[ 20 : 42 ] See in Adonijah we have a king who looks good on the surface. A king who has the right status in terms of birth. A king that looks powerful, a king that looks attractive, a king that looks popular.

A king who appears to be pious and religious. But the Lord sees not as man sees, man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart.

And this is the key thing here. Adonijah is not God's chosen king. Despite how great he looks externally.

He is the opposite of everything God looks for in the human heart. He is arrogant. He is self-centered. He's utterly consumed with his own glory and his own pride.

And God's word is clear that God is a God who exalts the humble and opposes the proud. But how do we fit this into the big picture, to what God is doing in his redemptive purposes and salvation?

[ 21 : 46 ] Well, as I said earlier, kings is redemptively selective history. And I think as you go through you see that the point of the book is to highlight that things are getting worse and worse and worse.

It starts bad but it gets worse. It's a book that focuses primarily on the failings of the kings. Even great King Solomon who seems to start so well.

See by the end of the book when we get to the end it's clear that something has to change. That some greater king is needed. And the rest of the Old Testament focuses in on that by looking at the coming of the Messiah.

This great king who is promised to put the world the right way up. And it becomes clear when we read the New Testament that Jesus is that figure, that Jesus is that Messiah, that King, that descendant of David who would be the ultimate King.

We see in Matthew 16 Peter recognizes this. He says to Jesus when Jesus asks him, who do you say that I am? Peter says, you are the Christ.

[ 22 : 53 ] You are the Messiah. You are the King that was promised. See Peter is recognizing there that Jesus is more than just a great teacher.

Many people today think that Jesus is just that. Peter recognizes that Jesus is not just another great prophet. He sees that Jesus is this King they've been looking forward to.

This King that was promised. The King who would defeat evil. The King who would bring justice to this world. The King who would put things right.

He would be a King who would not repeat the failings that we find in the book of kings. Jesus Christ is essentially the polar opposite to Adonijah.

See what did being King mean for Jesus? It certainly didn't mean exaltation. Verse 21 we read in Matthew's Gospel again. From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem.

[ 23 : 52 ] He must suffer many things and he must be killed. See Jesus is saying to his disciples that they've recognized who he is. He is the Messiah.

He is the King that was promised. But Jesus is saying that that means that things, his kingship, his ministry by human standards is not going to end well.

It's going to result in humiliation. It's going to result in pain. It's going to result in suffering and death. See if we were to stop today and make a list of what a great world saving figure would look like.

It would certainly not be like that. Our world today loves a superhero movie. In these films most of the superheroes have extraordinary superhuman abilities.

Super strength. They can fly. They can be bulletproof. Superman is all that. Captain America is super strong. He is super stamina. There's a guy called Professor X who can control things with his mind.

[ 24 : 52 ] The point is all of these characters use their great strength, their great superhuman powers to defeat evil. And storylines to these movies are usually pretty predictable.

Some evil power comes along, threatens the world and the superhero uses his powers, defeats the bad guy and the world is safe again. So when Jesus says that he must suffer many things, he must be killed at the hands of men that doesn't really fit in with our world's idea of a world saver, of a king who will put the world to right.

It certainly didn't fit in with the Jews idea of a messiah, of a king who would bring freedom and restoration, who would bring justice, who would defeat evil, who would bring peace and prosperity to Israel.

That's what the Old Testament says that king is going to do. What Jesus did looks more like failure by human expectations. I see the Jews, they expected Jesus to bring freedom from Roman occupation.

They expected him to be like some superhero who would give him freedom from foreign overlords and oppression, who would restore Israel to be a great nation.

[ 26 : 06 ] But Jesus says to them, yes, I am the messiah. I am the king that you've been waiting for. But that means suffering, not self-exaltation.

It means death, not glory. Jesus shows us what a true king should look like. And Paul builds on this in Philippians in chapter 2, which hopefully we'll be looking at next Sunday.

He says, Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing.

He took the very nature of a servant. He was found in human likeness, and he humbled himself. He became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

See Jesus Christ came as the king of Israel, the descendant of David who would sit on the throne forever. But what did that look like? We're told that Absalom and Adonijah and all these figures, they looked the part, they looked like kings, they acted like kings.

[ 27 : 13 ] We're told of Jesus that he had no beauty. He had no majesty in him to attract us to him. Everything in his appearance Isaiah says that we should desire him.

He's despised and rejected by mankind. A man of suffering, a man familiar with pain, like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised and we held him in low esteem.

Isaiah goes on to tell us that Jesus would be one to be crushed for our iniquities, that the punishment that brings us peace is on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

He says we all like sheep have gone astray, we have all turned to our own way, but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before it shears is silent, so he did not open his mouth. That is what being king meant for Jesus.

[ 28 : 17 ] Not self exaltation, not arrogantly coming in and saying I am the king, not displaying glory and power before others like Adonijah, not showing his own religious greatness.

See Matthew tells us in chapter 27 of his Gospel that before his death Jesus was flogged and beaten as the king. Now the whip that the Roman legionnaires used in their flogging was made of nine heavy leather strips.

Each one had small bits of lead embedded with glass, stone and bone. And that was brought down against Jesus back with full force.

The Romans did that were told until they could get the victim as near death as possible. So with Jesus half dead the Roman soldiers they put a robe on him. They put a stick in his hand, Matthew tells us, and they crown him with a crown of thorns.

This is what being king meant for Jesus. This is the kind of coronation he received. We are told that they spat on him. They hit him on the head over and over, pushing that crown deeper into his scalp.

[ 29 : 32 ] What contrast was the picture we have of an Adonijah? The picture we have throughout the book of Kings, Kings who exalt themselves, Kings who make great displays of power, of wealth, of glory.

Gospels don't tell us much about the pain Jesus would have felt. But we know from history that crucifixion was one of the cruelest and most torturous of deaths you can imagine.

One Jewish historian called Josephus described crucifixion as the most wretched way a human being can die. See the Romans would drive huge five inch long nails through the wrists and the feet.

The arms would slowly be wrenched out of the sockets. Eventually death would be caused by suffocation. In order for the crucified person to take a breath they would have to push themselves up on that nail through their feet.

Every breath would be agony. And above Jesus' head the whole time written, this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

[ 30 : 37 ] What complete contrast with Adonijah? Adonijah is opportunistic, self-serving, self-glorifying. Jesus Christ denies himself.

Jesus Christ serves others. He lays down his life for others. Jesus Christ was utterly obedient to his father's will even to the point of the most horrific death imaginable.

One writer called Tony Merida put it like this. He said we can learn from the story of Adonijah. It teaches us of our need to submit to God's will instead of pursuing our own self-interest.

Our purpose in life as the Westminster Confession reminds us is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Adonijah, he says, has his own confession, to glorify self and to pursue my own enjoyment.

Our world has taken up that as its confession. To glorify self and to pursue my own pleasure. I think Adonijah, this man from thousands of years ago, provides us with a really clear window into our own hearts.

[ 31 : 50 ] Each day, each hour we are faced with the decision between submitting to God's will and pursuing our own self-interest. Thomas reminded us of that last week in Proverbs, the choice between wisdom and folly.

It's one that is before us each day. Thankfully as part of our sanctification, as part of our being shaped into the image of God's Son, we will often want to be doing God's will.

But until we are made perfect, until Jesus Christ returns, we will always be battling with that tension. In his third letter in the New Testament, John reminds us that there will be Adonijah-like characters even within the church.

He speaks about a guy called Diotrophes. He says, Diotrophes loves to put himself first. The point is, in our sinful hearts, we all have the capacity to be like Adonijah.



We all have the capacity to share that ambition. We are constantly faced with that choice. Do we exalt ourselves? Do we put ourselves forward and say, I will be king?

[ 32 : 57 ] Or do we bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, Jesus Christ is king? So just as we close this afternoon, Paul says, have the mindset of Christ Jesus.

Christ Jesus who did not use his position through his own advantage. Christ Jesus who made himself nothing, who took the form of a servant and who humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen.