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Harvesting a Legacy

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by Pastor Matt Hook

John 12:24 *“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10 *“When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. ‘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.” ... Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David.”*

The Power of our Final Words can outlast us. See if you recognize these:

- “After all, tomorrow is another day.”
- “My momma always said ‘Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.’”
- “Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship”
- “Houston, we have a problem.”
- “Live long and prosper.”
- “There’s no place like home”
- “Remember, the force will be with you always”
- “God bless us, every one”
- “Look Daddy, teacher says ‘Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings’”
- “We’re always watching”
- “I’ll be right here”

Some shallow, some filled with depth of meaning, some filled with false hope, some filled with genuine hope: parting words. One of the things we recognize about people as they approach death in particular, not just saying goodbye but people we respect is that somehow their perspectives at that moment change or their words carry an extra special meaning. When people are close to death, as David was in this particular

scripture, all the illusions of life pass away. Suddenly there is no more need for masks, no more need to try to say things that are just the right things. You stand at a place where you can separate the wheat from the chaff, and so we listen carefully to what people say as they're on their death bed. There is special wisdom as they depart this life.

Mitch Album in his book Tuesdays with Morrie captured the essence of this. He describes his experience listening to one of his former professors as he was approaching his death. His perspectives were different than ours in our day to day living. So it is with the last words of people in the Scriptures. These have been preserved for 1000s and 1000s of years. We need to listen to what they have to say.

Moses in his last words, was 120 years old. He was standing before the Promised Land. He was not going to enter in, and as the people of Israel were gathered there, he gave them his final charge just before his death. You may remember these words: "*See I lay before you today. Life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life by following the commandments of the Lord your God, now and forever.*" (Deut. 30:19) And shortly after that Moses passed away. But his words "Choose life" echoed through the years to that next generation, and they remained faithful.

Or you may remember **Joshua**. Joshua followed the generation after Moses. He's entered the Promised Land, and stands before the people of Israel, but he himself is on his death bed, nearing the moment when he will pass away. His family is gathered around him, children, grandchildren. He looks at the leaders of Israel and he says these words to them "*Choose you this day whom you will serve... Choose either to serve the gods your fathers and mothers served in far and distant lands. Choose to serve the gods whom the nations around you serve, or choose to serve the Lord your God who delivered you from slavery in Egypt and who promises to give you life and has been your life and your hope. Choose you this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, and he turns to them all, we will serve the Lord.*" (Joshua 24:15). And the people of Israel were so inspired that they respond to his words "We will serve the Lord! We will serve the Lord!"; and a whole generation of people were inspired to continue to be faithful to God because of the witness of this man just before he died.

Then **Jesus**: His parting words just before he ascended to heaven. He turned to his disciples and he said to them "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all people. Make disciples of them and help them to know the commandments that I have taught you and to follow them. And lo, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.

And finally the words of **David**. David was 70, nearing his own death, and he is now reflecting and summarizing everything that is important to *him*. His son Solomon is sitting there frightened, in his late teens or early twenties, about to become the king. He needs his father's wisdom at this moment and he is listening carefully. David says "*Be strong, Solomon, and courageous. Don't be afraid. Obey the commandments of the Lord your God. Walk in his ways. Take charge of the commandments that he's given to you and continue to follow them. And then, and only then, can you be assured that God will bless your kingdom.*"

I wonder what your final words will be. What is it you want to say? Have you written your exit script? Maybe you've thought about what your funeral would be like. What will be really important? I imagine preaching a sermon there, too, but not a 25 minute one like now. Instead **I imagine trying to be the sermon as I lay there.** In the hopes that those children and grandchildren would say "I want to follow the same God my grandpa or great-grandpa followed. Because I saw life in him. I saw joy, even to the end."

What is the most important thing you could say and pass on to your friends and family if you knew you were about to die? What are the parting words of wisdom you'd give if you could?

The truth is many times **we don't have the opportunity to write our exit script.** In fact we never do. We never know exactly how we're going to die and what that's going to look like and sometimes we don't even have the *chance* to say our final words. I've been with many families where someone died tragically of a heart attack or auto accident, and inevitably what I hear is "You know, there was so much I wanted to say,

and I never had the chance to say them. There were so many words I wanted to pass on and I never got to say them – to my brother, to my mom or my dad or my son or my daughter or my friend. I wish I'd have had a little more time to say those things.

If there's one thing I've learned from the many people I've been with during those times, it's this: **Don't leave anything unsaid that's important.** Instead, say it now. If it really matters, if it's really something you wish you could have said, then be sure and say it today. When you go home, pick up the phone and call that person and let them know if there are things you would have liked to have patched up before the end, don't wait. Don't assume that the end is going to be 10 years from now or 20 years from now or a week from now. Say it today.

Ideally this is what it looks like. Even if your loved ones don't have a chance to say goodbye to **you they already know all the things you would have said, because you said them over and over and over again.** They don't need one last time to say "I love you" because they KNOW that you love them because they saw it, and heard it, and felt how deeply you love them. They don't need to hear one more time the most important things you wanted to say, that they're to follow the Lord their God or for you to pass on your faith to them, because you've been passing on your faith to them for years and years like a broken record. They already know what you would have said. They don't have to have that one last time, because you've already shared what needed to be said. And that's the ideal. Don't wait till the end. You may not have the opportunity to write that script. – do it now! **So here's the first thing about a legacy: the way to harvest it home is to say what's important today and regularly.**

The Bible not only gives us David's final words, but it gives us his final acts. In 1 Chronicles 29 tells us of David's Final Acts. He made a planned gift. David wanted to build a temple for God. He wanted to do that almost more than anything else. A great temple, a place of worship, a sanctuary. Up until David's time, Israel's place of worship was a tent, or a tabernacle. The people would gather together and they would worship and meet God. But by now the people had become stationary and David longed to build a temple, where generations of people would come and they would worship God and they would see God. They would be inspired by not just the architecture but by the experience of gathering together in that place. But God always said to David "No. Instead I'm going to let your son build it. Maybe your ego would take over, or you may be confused about the reason for building it." And that's what happened. Solomon built the Great Temple in Jerusalem. It stood for over 400 years, and the people would come there to worship. It was named among the great wonders of the ancient world. It was magnificent. Just before David's death, knowing *he* could not build the temple, he brought together the leaders of Israel and the people of Jerusalem and David brought from his storehouse all of his treasures, and David laid them before the leaders. And he said, "I give all of these things that I have. My possessions, my gold and my silver, I give to the Lord God to build a temple, a place in *his* name.

The effect of his gift was to inspire generosity in others and to enable the building of the temple. When the people looked at that, and saw this man who was close to death, at that point when you begin to determine what's really important, when he stood on the threshold, they looked at him and much like Mitch in Tuesdays with Morrie. The leaders said if this is what's really important to him, maybe it should be important to us too. And they began to bring their offerings to the Lord to build a temple to his name. And the people came and they gave generously. Finally they had to tell them to stop, they brought so much. And David in that moment captured the essence of what it means to be stewards of what we have. David, who, at the end of his life, recognized he couldn't take it with him, said this to the people of Israel. "Who am I? And who are my people that we could give as generously as this?" And then he looked to God and said "Everything comes from you, O God, and we have given you only what comes from your hands. O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your holy name, it comes from your hand anyway. And all of it belongs to you."

I'm almost sure that David saved something behind for Solomon his son and for his grandchildren and others. He passed something on to them, but in the words of those of you who are financial planners, David made a charitable gift. **He bequeathed something to the work of God that would touch generations to**

follow him. What would Israel have done without a Temple? So here's my second question for you: What will be your final acts? What will you do now to build a legacy? **The way to harvest it home is to do what's important today.**

What about you? How will you impact people's lives for Jesus Christ? What will your final acts be? David was an ordinary man with a genuine faith. He had mistakes and failures as well as success. A hundreds of years after David's death, the Apostle Paul describes David in Acts 13:22 "*David fulfilled God's purposes for his generation.*" What better could be said of us?

What will they say at your funeral? What will be the evidence that you were here? What kind of legacy will you leave? How will you harvest it? What is it that you will do in your life that will in some way inspire others after you're gone? Most of us would like to leave a legacy. We have in our minds that we would like people to know that we were here, that after we're gone we're not just one more funeral, and then nobody remembers us anymore. But the truth of it is, 100 years from now, no one is going to remember us anymore. Or almost no one.

Earlier this week, we were driving past Forest Lawn Cemetery and I asked my kids "Who are these people?" They had no idea. My kids said "ghosts." And the truth is that's reality for all of us. (Not the becoming ghosts part, but the fact that a time will come when no one remembers you). Harvesting a legacy is a lot more than having a nice tombstone.

Your legacy isn't going to be a building or road or subdivision with your name on it. It's going to be an investment in the lives of people. That's the legacy you leave behind. **The third way to harvest it home is to invest in the lives of people.**

No matter what, you will leave a legacy: either for good or bad. Whatever those seeds are you are scattering right now, that's what you will sow. Are you scattering seeds of hope and encouragement and generosity, or seeds of bitterness, spite, and selfishness? Which will it be? Paul writes this truth to the Galatians in 6:7-10 "*A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* [So Paul says:] *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*" That's why we must take time to talk about it. We *do* want to make a difference. And that takes all of us, living and giving to God's work.

Jesus left a legacy. Jesus gave himself away. John records Jesus' message for us today in his Gospel, verse 12:24 "*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*" And that legacy compels us. That legacy is Jesus. He gave himself away for us! He died that we may have life eternal. And as a result, we, too, are his legacy. And he is harvesting his legacy home.

Now for *my* final words. How do you harvest a legacy? Take time to plan for it right now, and begin right now. Just ask the Wings: without planning, we wouldn't have those huge pumpkins on Zeeb Rd. You reap what you sow. Without planning, there's no harvest. *Say* what's important today and regularly. *Do* what's important today. Invest in the lives of *people*. God has an eternal harvest planned for you and me! Won't you harvest it home?