



A FATHER'S PRAISE

SERIES: GIVE ME AN AUTHENTIC VOICE

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2 Samuel 7:1-29

Fifth Message

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Over the past several Sundays we have traced the shape of David's voice in the psalms, alongside his story in the books of Samuel. The dominant theme thus far has been David's cry of grief, a cry that has prompted many of his prayers and dominated others. If there is one characteristic that has marked David's prayers it is his honesty. This poet knows every tension of the soul and feels totally free to place each one before the Lord in worship. We saw too how his honesty proved to be the gateway through which he acquired a new understanding and orientation.

David strikes an entirely different tone in our study today. In a dark moment his voice rings out with pure praise, with no sorrow added. Pain and plea find their ending note in praise. Knowing little of this gift, the modern world seeks to build its own universe on self-sufficiency. And the modern church, though obsessed with the idea of praise, lacks the breadth and depth that gripped David. It is my prayer that his voice will help us recover the Biblical shape of praise, and the absolute necessity for authentic worship.

The story opens with David's dream to build a house for God.

I. David's Dream to Build God a House (7:1-3)

After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you." (2 Sam 7:1-3, NIV)

At this juncture, David is well established¹ in his rule in Jerusalem. Major enemies have been conquered; the once abandoned ark of God has found its way home; and the king resides in a luxurious palace built with foreign funds. But as David looks out from the luxury of his cedar-paneled palace, and sees the ark of God dwelling in a canvass shelter, he feels a twinge of embarrassment. Fokkelman suggests, "The king, who had roamed about as a guerrilla for years, sees how settled he has become and almost seems ashamed of his God's nomadic trait."²

At mid-life, David longs to leave a legacy that will outlast his years. He wants to leave his fingerprint on history—a trait that is common to all of us when we see the end in sight. God answers those yearnings for David, and in the process makes some outrageous promises to him, which scholars call the Davidic Covenant. These promises will become the driving force of salvation history, the taproot of the Messiah, and the very bedrock of the New Covenant and the gospel of grace. This text marks the theological center of the books of Samuel. It is the hinge on which everything else turns, the core of Old Testament faith; not

the whole of it, but the core of it. It answers the question, Where do we find that permanent legacy for which we so desperately yearn?

After David had voiced his unsettled feelings to Nathan, the prophet gave him full prophetic sanction to "go for it." After all, David was a man after God's own heart. His long string of uninterrupted successes proved that God was with him. He probably went to bed that night charged with enthusiasm for the new adventure, dreaming up ways of finding the venture capital and new tax structures to fund the project, recruiting world class architects for the design of the temple and amassing thousands of workers—stonemasons, metal craftsmen, weavers and embroiders—to create a permanent place for God in Israel. What a legacy—a temple—with David's name forever etched in stone! Sweet dreams for him. But Nathan didn't get much sleep that night. His slumber was interrupted with a visit from the Lord, who put an abrupt halt to David's dream, and then unveiled one of his own.

II. God's Refusal of David's Dream (7:4-7)

That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"

David's ambition provokes the pointed question from God, "Are *you* the one to build *me* a house to dwell in?" Then God proceeds to give him a history lesson. From the time of the Exodus to the present, was there ever a single occasion when God spoke of needing a permanent residence? It was the scandal of history that the Creator God, the redeemer of Israel, would travel with his people in the wilderness—and in a tent. Yet, this domicile gave God freedom and mobility to move whenever and wherever his people went. A tent portrays God as a dynamic mover, a lover of freedom and mobility. Housing him in a temple could have dangerous implications for how he was perceived. The dynamic picture of God might be replaced by that of a static deity encased in the royal stone of an established monarchy. If fact, the thought of a cedar palace is not at all to his liking. It provokes a sense astonishment that verges on indignation: "You want to do this for me, a house of cedar?" In like manner, I wonder how often our desire for greatness impinges on the freedom of others.

But, typically, when God says no to our plans, it is only because he has better ones for us. After he refuses David's initial proposal, he unveils his own plans for the king.

III. God's Dream to Build a House for David (7:8-17)

A. David's Past Blessings (7:8-9a)

"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you.

First, God reviews David's past. He had sprung from humble origins. As the despised youth of his family, his job was to follow after the sheep. Now, because of God's grace, David is king, and all the sheep in Israel are following him. What an amazing turn of events! And in that road from shepherd to king, God had never left his side, defeating every enemy along the way.

Having dealt with his past, God now turns David's attention to his future.

B. David's Future Blessings (7:9b-11a)

"Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

God is not yet done. There is still more grace to come. David is not yet an international star on the horizon ("great name"). God had yet to grant Israel, his people, a secure place on earth, where she could dwell undisturbed by her enemies. God's choice to bless David is not an end in and of itself; it is for the benefit of his people whom he loves. So God reminds David that just as his past was driven by grace, so would his future. God was just getting started, and he was not about to stop. The rest of the oracle looks ahead to David's distant future and redefines his original dream.

C. David's Dream Redesigned (7:11b-13)

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

God is saying, "Now as to that house you've been talking about. The idea is good, but it needs major redesign. Firstly, you have the wrong builder. You are not going to build a house for me; I am going to build a house for you. And secondly, you have the wrong materials." David wanted to build a house made of cedar; God wants to build (*banah*) David an eternal dynasty of sons (*ben*). We have dreams of building; God has dreams of birthing (Ps 127). What we build is temporary; what God births is eternal.

One of David's future sons would be the temple builder. This was fulfilled in Solomon, who built Israel's first temple. But Solomon was merely a shadow of the true seed of David: Christ, who would build the ultimate temple of God (Eph 2:19-22). And the material he would use would

not be stone or cedar, but "living stones" (1 Pet 2:4-5). In this temple God would find his ultimate rest (Rev 21:2-3), and his kingdom would have no end. David had no way of comprehending the magnitude of this temple.

God concludes the oracle with a word of assurance guaranteeing the results of this new venture.

D. David's Dream Sealed by a Father's Love (7:14-17)

"I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

God announces that he will personally adopt each son in David's line into a unique Father-son relationship. This is a powerful invitation of intimacy and privilege. Here we discover how the title "son of God," which originated in the Exodus (Exod 4:22) as a reference to Israel as God's firstborn son, now becomes focused on Israel's king (Ps 2:7), and speaks of the intimacy of the relationship which the Father desires with his "son" through prayer. The psalms originated first and foremost as prayers of the king in response to the Father's invitation, "Ask of Me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" (Ps 2:8).

These promises build on the Old Covenant, because they narrow the promises and blessings of Israel to one house in David, and they supersede the Old Covenant because there is no "if" clause attached to them. The promises are unconditional and irrevocable. Therefore the success of this new dynasty is guaranteed. Unlike the Old Covenant, which depended on man's obedience and faithfulness, the Davidic Covenant could not be hindered by the behavior of the sons. With no "if" clause in the covenant, God declares that he is taking ultimate responsibility for both parties in the relationship. The sons may be disciplined but never cut off, and the dynasty will last forever.

In Christ, you may sin and you may be disciplined, but God will never disown you, for a father can never disown a son. You can never remove yourself from his love, a love that beckons you, draws you, embraces you, weeps over you, cleanses you and renews you. This is the gospel: the gospel of pure grace.

After Nathan reported the words of this entire revelation, David's original temple plans must have looked shabby by comparison. Notice that David's eyes are open to what God wants to do for him at the very point in his life when his dream died. It is when our earthly dreams die that our souls become most sensitive to what is eternal. At this critical juncture, when the door of opportunity is shut, a window into heaven is opened and we are able to perceive the eternal horizon as never before. No earthly dream dies without a heavenly one transcending it. As our Lord said to Peter, "I tell you the truth...no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

IV. Speechless with Praise (7:18-29)

A. Awestruck by the Present Encounter (7:18-22)

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?" (7:18-19)

The text opened with David "settled" (*yashav*) in his royal palace, longing to give God a permanent "dwelling" (*yoshev*) place on earth; it ends with David outside his palace "sitting" (*yoshev*) alone before the Lord. David is basking in his relationship with God, with no house, no props, nothing...only the God who gives rest. This suggests that we achieve a sense of satisfaction and permanence in life, not by what we build for God, but by having our eyes opened to what God is building for us.

Hearing these promises for the first time, David is undone. He can hardly grasp the dimensions or plumb the depths of what was just said. Awestruck and dazed, he has difficulty finding words to articulate what he feels. But speak he must. Now, from a heart bursting with gratitude, he places a plethora of praise on the altar of God.

The vision plunges David into hallowed humility: "Who am I?" Nothing is more beautiful than the sight of a human heart drenched in humility and overflowing with appreciation. David asks, "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD...that you have brought me this far? But for you that is not far enough, you have the far future, even eternity in mind" (thus far = *ad halom*; forever = *ad 'olam*). What David considers the greatest measure of grace in his life, God considers *small* (a verbal echo of David's being the "smallest" in his family). So surprised is he by God's generosity that he asks in amazement, "Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?" The text reads, literally, "This is the torah ("law") of man," suggesting that perhaps this will be God's new way of relating with mankind, this New Torah (or New Covenant) of grace that will drive history unto eternity.

"What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant. How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears (7:20-22).

So overcome with appreciation is David, the one gifted in speech, he has no words. He can merely recount what he has heard. But though he cannot speak, the knowledge of being known penetrates him, and thus he knows his heart will speak, though the words are inadequate. When God acts in such a lavish way, the soul finds no rest until it speaks in full praise. Praise makes us supremely human. I find it a moving experience when our foreign brothers and sisters express their praise in English. Though they stammer a bit for lack of vocabulary, or stumble over grammatical structure, their words have such emotion they communicate right to the heart.

B. Appreciation for the Privileged Past (7:23-24)

"And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for

himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God.

The initial impact of this new revelation is to strengthen David's historical roots. He has a heightened awareness and appreciation for his privileged past. He reflects on the glory of the Exodus, when heaven touched earth on an international scale, the time when Egypt, the greatest nation on earth, quaked in terror to give birth to Israel through the sea. God's new promises to David are of the same magnitude and are in continuity with the wonders he has done in the past. True praise therefore should widen our horizons and strengthen our sense of being rooted in history. We are part of a very privileged past. The weakness of much of our modern praise is that there is great enthusiasm for praise, but seldom are concrete, historical reasons given for it. Praise in the Psalms is rooted in God's historic acts of salvation. Singing serves as a constant reminder of what he has done for us and gives us a sense of belonging with the heritage of our forefathers. Nothing could be more vital for our current generation that wanders aimlessly in the pain of isolation and has almost no sense of history. We are the heirs of four thousand years of salvation history. This is a treasured possession, one we must never forget.

Awestruck by the present and appreciative for the past, David now turns his gaze to the future.

C. Anticipation of Future Glory (7:25-29)

"And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, so that your name will be great forever. Then men will say, "The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!" And the house of your servant David will be established before you. O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer. O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."

God's revelation takes David into a future of blessing beyond his wildest imagination. If the past was good, and the present better, the future is beyond comprehension. In the past, David was part of a privileged nation. But now from that nation there will be one house, and in that house there will be one s(S)on who will be the focus of all the blessings of Abraham. And David is right at the center. This revelation powerfully draws him into a future he never dreamed could be so good. The anticipation of it reshapes his life and becomes the focus of his prayers. He embraces this glorious future through prayer. Yet even prayer begins with God, not with us. Because God revealed his heart to David, David found courage (lit. "heart") to pray to God. Eugene Peterson calls prayer the "answering speech." God reveals his will from heaven, and when we answer from earth, heaven is then engaged

and drives history. Praise makes the holy circle of eternal life complete.

In like manner, the New Covenant makes us an eschatological people. We are drawn into the future. We delight in the future and live for it because the best is yet to be. We should not be able get over the privilege of being part of it. For us, there should be no such thing as the good old days. We are to lift our gaze beyond time to see a future that is all encompassing, with the Lord reigning over all Israel, all nations and the whole of the earth with infinite blessings, forever and ever.

What impact did this New Covenant have on David's soul? He was awestruck in the present, appreciative for his past, and exulting in the future. This is the gift of praise. I will conclude with four reflections about praise.

V. Reflections on Praise

A. Praise makes us truly human

David's words, "*Who am I, O Lord?*" are among the most beautiful in Scripture. Nothing makes us more human than when the heart speaks out of humility and appreciation. Ten times in this poem David embraces the title "servant" as his true identity. This is what true praise does for us. Because we live in an age that is blind to grace and destroyed by self-sufficiency, we need to be revitalized by praise. Brueggemann writes, "we are at a break point in Western culture...we are in a deep emergency. The emergency is the shriveling of the human spirit, the decline of the human infrastructure, and the disappearance of human imagination. That shriveling, decline, and disappearance correlate with technological ascendancy and are manifested in fatigue, anxiety, despair, amnesia, numbness, and finally in brutality."³ By contrast, praise makes us humble servants with tender hearts that overflow with appreciation.

B. Praise is the ultimate expression of our trust

David confesses that God's grace to him is so mind blowing that he has no words to describe it. But though he lacks words, he still must speak. Praise is not optional. Praise is the human response to grace. Though all he can do is recount what God has said, he does so with a heart full of emotion. (T.S. Eliot once said, "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal.") Praise is our ultimate expression of trust in the Living God. It is our constant confession that life does not consist in our achievements, but in what God is doing for us. Praise puts us at odds with the world around us because it declares that its idols are bankrupt. And so David declares, "How great you are, O Sovereign LORD. There is *no one* like you, and there is *no God* but you, as we have heard with our own ears" (7:22).

C. Praise centers and integrates our life into the history of God's grace

God's plans for David are of such a magnitude, the only thing that David can compare them with are the wonders of Israel's Exodus. God was on the move again, doing amazing wonders, just as he did in Egypt. There is coherence in God's history. And so David's praise not only centers his life in God's grace, it also integrates him into Is-

rael's sacred history. True praise should never isolate us, but connect us with our privileged past and give us a sense of continuity with all that has gone before. As we praise our God we should feel as though we were looking through an album of our family history. We remember the patriarchs, Moses, David, the prophets, Jesus, his cross, resurrection and ascension, and gift of the Holy Spirit, who is now growing us "into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21).

D. Praise pulls us into a future with no sorrow added to it

This is first time in his career that David's advance is not somehow laced with sorrow. Anointed as king privately in his home, he was later spurned by his brothers and abandoned by his mother and father. After his great victory over Goliath, all Israel lauded him, but Saul tried to impale him on his spear. Then he was exiled into a wilderness. On the very day of his vindication, when he could publicly display his crown, he was stabbed with grief over the death of Jonathan. His first act as king was to preside at his best friend's funeral. After he united all the northern tribes with the south, and was crowned as king over one nation, both the leading general and the former king of the north were brutally murdered by members of his own court, and he had to preside at their funerals. Then at his finest hour, when he brought the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem, his jubilation was struck down by the death of Uzzah. Months later, when he was successful, his jubilation was dashed again when his own wife vilified him. Up until this moment it is as if David's every step forward is followed by grief.

But now when God speaks of a New Covenant, David speaks, and there is no sorrow added to it. It is pure, undiluted joy, because it is a future of God's doing, untainted by the hands of men. David did nothing but receive it as a gift while he slept, and history will move irresistibly to this goal solely because of God's loyal-love.

Why should we praise? To embrace a future that is certain, undefiled and reserved for us in heaven.

For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name (Heb 13:14-15).

1. The Hebrew verb *yashav* means "to dwell," "settle down," or "live"; it carries with it the idea of permanence. A key word in the text, it is used six times (1, twice in v. 2, 5, 6, 18).
2. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. III, Throne and City*, (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1990), 210.
3. Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 131.

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