



LONGING FOR A LASTING LEGACY

SERIES: THRONE AND CITY

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2 Samuel 7:1-17

13th Message

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During the past few weeks I feel I have discovered what the gist of mid-life is all about. We have begun taking care of my wife's 85-year-old stepfather. He is very feeble from constrictive heart failure. He can barely walk. His world moves at a slow, dream-like pace, one in which time seems suspended and memory is more significant than action. From that world, Emily and I must make the transition into the passionate, fast-paced world of our teenage daughters. In their arena, vigor and strength are what counts; reflection is a private matter.

I have found that mid-life is like being on the top of a high mountain from which I can see both the beginning and the end. From this vantage point I am more keenly aware of my beginnings, and acutely conscious of my end. I have concluded that there are two responses one can have to mid-life. You can try to relive your youth, denying there is an end; or, knowing the end is near, you can become more reflective. Longing for eternal significance, you try to extract the eternal out of your remaining years.

That very yearning surfaces in our story on the life of King David of Israel, from the book of Second Samuel this morning. David is at mid-life, and he longs to leave a legacy that will outlast his years, to leave his fingerprint on the pages of history. God answers those yearnings and makes David a number of outrageous promises which the Bible calls the Davidic Covenant. These promises 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. This is the core of Old Testament faith; not the whole of it, but the core of it. It answers the question, Where is that lasting legacy we so desperately yearn for to be found? Our story opens with David's dream to build a house for God.

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

Now it came about when the king lived (dwelt) in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you." (NASB)

At this point David is well established¹ in his rule in Jerusalem. All major enemies have been conquered; the once abandoned ark of God has found a home in the capital; 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, he feels a twinge of embarrassment

as he beholds the ark of God housed in a canvas shelter. "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 The king is in his condo, while God resides in a pup tent.

David voices his unsettled feelings to the prophet Nathan. This is the first time we hear of this court prophet, who makes his entrance into the David story without introduction.³ Underneath the words of David, Nathan immediately perceives the vision, and grants David full prophetic sanction to proceed. After all, David is a man after God's own heart. His long string of uninterrupted successes proves that God is with him.

I imagine that both king and prophet went to bed that night charged with enthusiasm for the new venture. David dreamt of raising the venture capital needed; and he began planning the new tax structures necessary to fund the project. He dreamt of recruiting the best architects and gathering thousands of workers—stonemasons, metal craftsmen, weavers and embroiderers—all to leave behind a permanent place for God in Israel. What a legacy—a temple, with David's name on it, forever etched in stone! Sweet dreams for David.

But Nathan did not get much sleep that night. His repose was interrupted with a visit from the Lord. God put an abrupt halt to David's dream, and unveiled his dream for the king. The narrator grants us the privilege of hearing the revelation at the same time as Nathan receives it, as an oral audition. Thus we hear the revelation before David hears it in the morning. This literary technique draws us into the drama and makes us "live" with the revelation through the night, as if we were right there with the prophet.

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

But it came about in the same night that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?"'"

As is the case with many visions in the Bible, God makes his appearance at night, when people are alone, asleep and still. It is at night, when our senses are shut down, that God speaks to the hearts of men (see Job 4:13; Ps 16:7). And he speaks personally and intimately ("you and Me"). God calls David "my servant." This is a remark-

able title, one that is seldom conferred by God on anyone in the Old Testament. Previous to this time, the only two men considered worthy of being called this were Moses and Joshua. As Fokkelman observes: "It is a sign of great trust. God expects his servant to run things properly."⁴

David's ambition provokes a pointed question from God: "Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?" Then God gives David a history lesson. From the time of the Exodus to the present, God asks, was there ever a single occasion when he needed or spoke of a permanent residence? The question must be asked: Why did God choose to dwell in a tent? How scandalous that the Creator God, the Redeemer of Israel, would travel with his people in the wilderness—and in a tent, of all things!

A tent had certain advantages, however. A tent gave God freedom and mobility to move wherever his people went. God is a walker. He is a hiker, a dynamic mover who loves his freedom and mobility. A temple could have dangerous implications for how God is perceived. It might serve to guarantee his permanent presence, but at the same time it could inhibit his freedom. The dynamic God of the wilderness, replaced by a static deity encased in the royal stone of an established monarchy? Not likely. In fact, the thought of a cedar palace is not at all to God's liking. It provokes an astonishment that verges on indignation: "You want to do this for Me? A house of cedar?" God demands. I wonder how often our desire for a legacy impinges on the freedom of others.

After God refuses David's initial proposal, he unveils his plans for David, in four parts.

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

(a) David's Past: God Designed, God Driven (8-9b)

"Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be ruler over My people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you.'"

First, God reviews David's past. What humble origins he had. As the despised youth of the family, David occupied his days following after sheep. How things had changed. Now, as king, all the sheep of Israel were following him. God had drawn David out of his humble and painful origins into something very large and significant. And in that journey from shepherd to king, God was right beside him, defeating every enemy.

The personal and intimate tone of God's review of David's past can be heard in the resonant repetition of the pronouns "I" and "you," which echo through the text. There is a very personal touch about divine election. When we pause to reflect on our own election, our eyes well up with tears of appreciation.

Life up to this point in David's existence was God designed and God driven.

Next, God goes on to speak of David's future.

(b) David's Near Future: God Driven, God Expanding (9c-11b)

"and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies."

God says he is not done with David. There is still more grace to come. David is not yet an international star on the horizon ("a great name"). God had yet to grant his people Israel a secure place on earth where they could dwell undisturbed by their enemies. The clear point is that God's choice and lavish blessings on David were not an end in themselves; they were for the benefit of all Israel, his people whom he loved. Leaders exist for the benefit of the people, not the other way around.

So God reminds David that just as his past was all of grace, so his future is going to be driven by God's grace. God was not done. He was not about to stop midstream.

The rest of the oracle looks ahead to David's distant future and redefines his original dream.

(c) David's Dream (Distant Future): God Redesigned in Greater Dimensions (11c-13)

"The Lord also declares to you that the Lord will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

Here is the "center of gravity" of the oracle.⁵ God's vision for David is communicated in the terms of David's original dream, thereby validating his dreams. God says, in effect, "Now as to that house you have been talking about, that dream you have for a lasting legacy. It's a good idea, but it needs some major redesign work. First, you've got the wrong builder. You are not going to build a house for me. I'm going to build a house for you. Second, you have the wrong materials." This is a play on words. David wanted to build a house made of stone, but God wants to build David an eternal dynasty of sons. We have dreams of building, but God has dreams of birthing. What we build is temporary, what God births through us is eternal.

Actually, one of David's future sons, Solomon, would be the temple builder. 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). God's Messiah would build a temple of living stones! This was where God would find his ultimate rest. Revelation reveals that this new temple, "made without hands," when complete, will fill the whole creation. David never had such dimensions in mind.

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

(d) David's Dream (Far Future): Sealed in a Father's Love (7:14-17)

"I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My

loyal-love shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”” In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David. (7:14-17

God announces that every future king upon taking office would be adopted by him into a Father/son relationship. This is a powerful invitation of intimacy and privilege. This is where the title “son of God” originates (see Ps 2:7, the coronation psalm for Israel’s kings). This is the designation of Israel’s anointed king, who had a unique relationship of intimacy with the Father, one that was especially evidenced in prayer. We can see this developed in 1 Kings 8, when Solomon dedicates the temple, labeling it a house of prayer for the king. (We have seen several times in these studies that the Psalms were the prayers of the king.)

Furthermore, God says that the success of this new dynasty is guaranteed. Unlike the Old Covenant, which was dependent on man’s obedience and faithfulness, this New Covenant could not be set aside by the behavior of the sons. There is no “if” clause in the New Covenant. From now on, God would take ultimate responsibility for both sides of the relationship. The sons may be disciplined, but they would never be cut off. Thus there would always be a son on David’s throne. Here is the blank check of blessing and glory.

What a life David had! It was God initiated, God designed, God driven, God expanded, and God completed. But, most important of all, throughout David’s life his relationship with God was an intimate one. How shabby those temple plans must have seemed to David after he began to get a glimpse of a different kind of house, in all its new dimensions. Imagine David’s joy in heaven, when he meets all his sons.

The scene closes in verse 18:

Then David the king went in and sat before the Lord, and he said, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?”

The text opened with David “sitting” in his royal palace, longing to give God a permanent dwelling place “to sit” on earth. It ends with David out of his palace, “sitting” before the Lord.

We achieve a sense of permanence in life not by what we build for God, but by having our eyes opened to what God is building for us. This is not like a parent-child relationship. No matter what occurs down the road, this relationship is never going to change. God doesn’t want anything from us. We do not have to build anything or do anything. All we have to do is just keep receiving. Nothing else is required.

IV. Reflections On David’s Dream

(a) David’s Legacy, Our Dream

Remember that the narrator allows us to hear the revelation, and to live with it through the night, before David hears it. The reason for this is to draw us into the story, so that we can feel as if David’s story is our story. If ever

there was an oracle addressed directly to you and me, it is this. Is David a unique servant of God? In Christ, so are we. Is David a “son of God,” uniquely drawn into the heart of Father as Israel’s king? In Christ, that invitation and privilege of intimacy is ours. Is David’s life a pure gift from God, with no conditions from beginning to end? In Christ, so is ours. Our lives are God initiated, God designed, God driven, God expanded, and God completed.

In Christ, you may sin, you may be disciplined, but God will never disown you. This Father can never disown a son. And you can never remove yourself from his love, a love which beckons you, draws you, embraces you, weeps over you, cleanses you, and renews you. This is the gospel of pure grace. You can be a Christian for many years, but at some juncture, as was the case with David, God’s love breaks through in a new way and expands the dimensions of grace for you. This is a beautiful thing to behold as you gain a deepened sense of God’s love, confirming your identity as a son.

When this kind of experience came to saints in the past, the only way they could express their overwhelming sense of appreciation for this kind of unconditional love was to draw on the language of the Song of Solomon to speak of their love for the Lord:

St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*

On a dark night,
Kindled in love with yearnings—oh, happy chance!
I went forth without being observed,
My house being now at rest.

In darkness and secure,
By the secret ladder, disguised—oh, happy chance!
In darkness and in concealment,
My house being now at rest.

In the happy night,
In secret, when none saw me,
Nor I beheld aught,
Without light or guide, save that which burned in my heart.

This light guided me,
More surely than the light of noonday
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me -
A place where none appeared.

Oh, night that guided me,
Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,
Oh night that joined Beloved with love,
Lover transformed in the Beloved!

Upon flowery breast,
Kept wholly for himself alone,
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him,
And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.

The breeze blew from the turret,
As I parted his locks;
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck
And caused all my senses to be suspended.

I remained, lost in oblivion;
My face I reclined on the Beloved.
All ceased and I abandoned myself,
Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.

(b) When Do We Best Perceive It?

A second thing that I find amazing about this text is the place where David is in his journey with God when he perceives this new truth. Note that his perception of the ever-expanding dimensions of God's grace come at the very point in his life when his dream dies. David's hunger to leave a lasting legacy, a permanent home for God, is flatly refused. When our earthly dreams die, our souls become most sensitive to what is eternal. It is as if at this crucial moment in our journey, a window into Eden is thrown open and we are able to perceive heaven's horizon as never before. The key is to go sleep. That is when we perceive God's dream, a dream that outlasts history.

The movie *Mr. Holland's Opus* opened me up to a dream that died in me, but one that in its death exposed me to a new dimension of God's dream. Mr. Holland dreamt of being a composer of great music, but instead he had to settle for becoming a teacher of music in a high school. He never realized his dream, but his life and music touched hundreds of high schoolers. That was his opus.

As I watched that movie, some pain surfaced in me from some of my dreams that have been shattered. But then I remembered that it was the death of my dreams that resulted in my birth as a heavenly son.

1. "to dwell", "settle down", "live" (Hebrew, *yashab*) carries with it the idea of permanence. It is a key word, used six times in the text (vv 1, 2, 2, 5, 6, 18).

2. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. III, Throne and City* (Assen: Van Gorcum 1986), 210.

3. Nathan makes three appearances in the story here, 2 Sam. 12, and 1 Kings 1.

4. Fokkelman, *Throne and City*, 214.

5. Fokkelman, *Throne and City*, 227.

□

Son,
I love that name,
Conjuring up
All within me.

"A serene splendor,
That takes your breath away."

I haven't heard it
In a while,
In fact, I ache to say
I can't remember when?

Did he ever think it,
Say it, mean it?
Did son ever conjure up joy
For him beyond my birth?

I thought I was over it,
Over forty,
But now perhaps most pained
When reflection is the brightest.

I thought I was over it,
Until someone dedicates
An opus to his son,
And I forever remain a stranger.

And then I remember my son,
Who conjured up everything for me
For a few brief moments;
Now gone until the Dawn sings.

O sing O soul,
Play the notes,
Resonate and play,
For this is what you were made for.

"This is my beloved son,
My son, my son!"

—Brian Morgan

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