



SPEECHLESS WITH PRAISE

SERIES: *THRONE AND CITY*

Catalog No. 1028

2 Samuel 7:18-29

14th Message

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May 5th, 1996

A few weeks ago, my wife and I attended the fiftieth wedding anniversary of a dear couple. Their children gave a celebration dinner for three hundred of their friends, but the best gift they gave them was when they passed around a microphone so that the guests could share words of appreciation for what the Lord had done through their fifty years of marriage. Later in the evening, twenty individuals who had been adopted into the home of this couple posed for a special photograph to be presented to them.

How important praise is to the human soul! We are most human, and God is most present, when we stand and speak appreciation for those whom we love.

In our text today we come to an occasion in David's life when his soul bursts forth with praise for God. His words of praise are uttered at a holy juncture: the God of Israel had just revealed what we now call the "Davidic Covenant" to the king. David, who was well established in his rule in Jerusalem, had wanted to leave God a lasting legacy, a permanent house to dwell in. But God told David he could not build a house for him. God was going to build a house for David, not a temporal house of cedar, but an eternal dynasty of sons, culminating in the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. These promises build on the Old Covenant. They narrow the promises and blessings of Israel to one house, the house of David, and they supersede it, because there is no "if" clause attached to them. These are promises that are unconditional and irrevocable.

On hearing the promises for the first time, David is undone. He cannot grasp the dimensions or plumb the depths of what God has promised. Awestruck and dazed, he has difficulty finding words to articulate his feelings. But speak he must, and in the beauty of humility, he places a plethora of praise on the altar of God.

Our text serves as a very good description of what happens to the human soul when it finally comes to an experiential knowledge of the New Covenant. How does the soul react when the notions of election and grace move from the head to the heart; when the love of God permeates the very air we breathe; when we finally wake up to the fact that everything is from God, and nothing from us? (2 Cor 3:5). We respond by giving up, letting go, and losing ourselves in the love of God. We quit trying to be something we are not. We give up the masks of our shame, and enjoy being ourselves.

This event permanently shaped David's demeanor, and how he viewed his life from every vantage point,

past, present and future. My prayer is that it might shape the way we view our lives as well.

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

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? And yet this was insignificant (small) in Your eyes, O Lord God, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom (torah) of man, O Lord God! And again what more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, O Lord God! For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness to let Your servant know. For this reason You are great, O Lord God; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. (NASB)

(a) The Soul at Rest

The text opens with the king sitting beside the ark, before the presence of the Lord. He is seated in praise, his soul quiet, his whole being at rest. It was this "settled rest" that David had longed to give to God by building him a house. But lasting permanence is not for man to give to God. Rather, it is God who gives permanence to man, and that comes as pure gift. God said to David: "You shall not build a house for me. I am going to build a house for you."

This new revelation diminishes David's vision to a whisper. It breaks in on the corridors of history with a new vision that will fill eternity itself. And, unbelievably, David is the center of it. There is nothing more fulfilling than being part of something much larger than yourself. So David "sits" in the presence of God, basking in that relationship. There is no talk of a house for God, and no props. There is nothing but God, the God who gives rest.

(b) Plunged into Humility

Secondly, the vision plunges David into hallowed humility. "Who am I?" he asks. What a beautiful thing it is to see a soul bathed in humility and overflowing with appreciation. David's first words are: "Who am I, O Lord God...that You have brought me this far?" He continues: "But for you, that is not far enough. You have the far future, even eternity, in mind. What I consider the greatest measure of grace in my life, you con-

sider small." This is a verbal echo to David being the "smallest" in his family.

Then David says: "And this is the torah of man, O Lord God." Some translations read: "This is the custom of man." But this is best understood literally as "torah." In other words, this is the New Covenant, a new torah for man. This is the new engine that is going to drive history to eternity—rest and hallowed humility.

(c) Identity Secure

Thirdly, the vision gives David a wonderful sense of secure identity. He has an abiding sense of who he is and who God is. Ten times he addresses God as the "Lord God," and seven times, himself as his "servant." David has a vision of the lofty exaltedness of God in his senses, coupled with the supreme sense of privilege he has for being God's servant. His identity is founded and secure, placed, as it were, in stone.

(d) Inadequate in Speech, but Eloquent in Heart

Finally, David, the one gifted in speech, is so overcome with appreciation that he cannot find words to express himself. He can merely recount what he has heard. Though he cannot speak, however, the knowledge of his being known penetrates him. Thus he knows his heart will speak—he will speak because he must—though his words are inadequate. When God acts in such a lavish way, the soul finds no rest until it speaks in full embodied praise.

How do you know if you have truly experienced this New Covenant? The answer is, there will be a quiet rest in your soul because you will know who you are. Your demeanor will be bathed in humility. You will yearn to praise God from your heart.

I am always overwhelmed when I read letters from our friends in Romania, especially the letters of Jonathan, the brother-in-law of our own Jim Foster. Jonathan is always so appreciative of our visits to his country that he can scarcely find words to express his appreciation. I will read an excerpt from a recent letter from him:

Often I ask myself, Why O God do you surround me with so much loyal love and goodness? Through whose sacrifice was I, a sinner, made worthy of such brotherly love? Because of what mystery, kept to the coming day, did you mobilize the Saints from PBCC and send them to the mountains of far off Romania with hearts and backpacks full of unique love? What did you find in us, O Lord, that you put into the heart of those shepherds, in love with heaven, the desire to gaze upon us, some dreaming little sheep, which through the mountains and valleys with storms were languishing in our longing to meet with you? What did you whisper in that mysterious moment into their ears of your servants, who left their wives and precious little children, the flowers of their hearts and little buds like dew covered berries, when they departed across countries and seas with dangers and

sacrifices? What did you tell them O Lord that caused them to come and weep with us in longing for you? What did you show them, I wonder, that there would be the light of heaven in their eyes and in their voice some kind of mingling of Golgotha's sighs and hymns of the resurrection? And what kind of strength poured forth from your grace O Lord that you convinced some in their old age to climb the mountains like in the years of his youth. And others to eat with us from the same pot and to wash themselves in the spring and to sleep in the attic of an abandoned cabin. Why Lord did you use a chain of wonders through which we met one another?

For what Lord did you do so many miracles and make so much of an investment in us? Other innumerable questions carry me on the path of memories which are from now on more and more with you and about you our beloved brothers. That is why our impatience to see you again is growing moment by moment, and I don't know if this burden will melt in the mystery of our holy embraces of if it will grow again and again!

We will do anything for people who show such appreciation. And God will do anything for us when we praise him, because we are awestruck by what he has done.

Now David turns from the present to speak of how this revelation ties him with his holy past.

II. Appreciation for Our Privileged Past (7:23-24)

"And what one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods? For You have established for Yourself Your people Israel as Your own people forever, and You, O Lord have become their God.

Have you noticed how rootless people feel in our modern world? In our fast-paced, high tech society, we have little sense of family or history. Painfully, we are learning that we can't function without a sense of history. No sense of lasting significance can be wrought from present experience alone. We must be part of something that is larger than ourselves.

The revelation of the New Covenant strengthens David's historical roots, and gives him a heightened awareness and appreciation for his privileged past. That is why he asks: "What nation is like Israel upon the earth?" He could never forget the redemption of Israel in the Exodus, when heaven touched earth on an international scale. Egypt, the greatest nation on the face of the earth, quaked in terror as Israel was given birth through the sea. David could never get over the uniqueness of that event. It was something that had

never happened before in history. It unheard of, unthinkable. Nor could David could forget the power of it, when ten plagues shook a nation and its idols. And he could never forget the intimacy of it ("for Yourself"), or the impact of it (it would last forever). The New Covenant, though new, does not cut us off from our past; it keeps us in close touch with the roots of our salvation. How privileged we are to be part of the elect!

This same sense of privilege came home to a friend of mine a few years ago in Jerusalem. I was standing at the Wailing Wall with my friend, Kim Anderson. It was my third time there, but it was the first time for Kim. He was quietly looking at the same Herodian stones that were there when Jesus came to the temple. As Kim stared at three thousand years of redemption history represented by these stones, he began to weep, awestruck that God had grafted him in as an adopted son into this heritage.

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

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

"Now therefore, O Lord God, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house, confirm it forever; and do as You have spoken, that Your name may be magnified forever, by saying, 'The Lord of hosts is God over Israel'; and may the house of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made a revelation to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore Your servant has found courage (lit. "heart") to pray this prayer to You. And now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant. Now therefore, may it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You. For You, O Lord God, have spoken; and with Your blessing may the house of Your servant be blessed forever."

The revelation provokes in David awe in the present and appreciation for the past. Now it draws him into a future of blessing beyond his wildest dreams. If the past was good, and the present better, the future was beyond comprehension. David was part of a privileged nation among nations. Now, out of that privileged nation, there would be one house, and one son in that house who would 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.

People of the New Covenant are eschatological people. They are drawn into the future. They delight in it and live for it. Why is that? It is because they know that the best is yet to be. They take no delight in the good old days. The word "retire" is blasphemy to them. So let us lift our gaze beyond earth to heaven. God's Kingdom is going to reign with a future that is all encompassing.

Jesus will be Lord over all Israel and all the nations of the earth, with infinite blessings, forever and ever.

I see this attitude so clearly demonstrated by several women in our congregation, most of whom have out-lived their husbands. They are so filled with appreciation for God that every service they offer to God is a delight to them. They are always forward looking. One gathers immigrants from foreign countries; another evangelizes at youth prisons; another travels to Russia every year to preach the gospel. She takes part in prayer renewal country wide, and is helping organize a Billy Graham Crusade in San Jose. These women are New Covenant Christians.

David enters into this future through prayer. But even prayer begins not with us, but with God. Because God revealed his heart to David, David found the heart to pray to God. Prayers are not arbitrary wishes based on wishful thinking or naive optimism buoyed by our unpredictable hormones. David prayed: "Your words are truth." God's words are bedrock. Stand on them. Hang your life on them. God has spoken from heaven; we answer from earth. Eugene Peterson calls prayer, "answering speech." When we answer from earth, heaven is then engaged and history is moved by God. The holy circle of eternal life is completed.

What impact did the New Covenant have on David's soul? He is awestruck in the present, appreciative for his past, and he exults in the future, in the hope of the glory of God.

IV. Reflection and Application

(a) A Reflection

In reflecting on this text I notice that this is first time in David's career when his advance is not somehow laced with grief.

David was anointed king, privately in his home, only to be spurned by his own brothers and abandoned by his mother and father. After his great victory over Goliath he was lauded by Saul's son and by all Israel. But the king tried to impale him on his spear; and he was driven out into a wilderness for ten years. On the very day of his vindication, when at last he could publicly wear 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. Then David finally united all the northern tribes with the south into one people. He was crowned as the one king over one people. But as a consequence, both the leading general and former king of the north were brutally murdered by members of David's own house and David had to preside at their state funerals. Then in his finest hour, as spiritual leader of Israel, he brought the ark of the covenant up to Jerusalem. But his jubilation was struck down by the death of Uzzah. Months later, when he was successful, his jubilation was again dashed when he was publicly vilified by his own wife. Every successful step which David took was followed by grief and sorrow, until now, in this

very moment when God speaks of a New Covenant.

Now David speaks with pure praise. There is no grief, no sorrow, only unadulterated joy, because his future is all God's doing; it would be untainted by the hands of men. David did nothing to gain all of this. All he had to do was receive it as a gift while he slept. History will move irresistibly to this goal solely because of God's loyal-love. And this is future we are all destined for, one that is solely God's doing, untainted by human hands; and thus our soul will be given over to pure praise.

(b) Application

Have you been touched by the love of God in the New Covenant? Are you awestruck by your own encounter with God's love? Perhaps you are saying, "That's not for me." But it is! Listen to these words of the apostle Paul, from his letter to the Romans:

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,...and we exult in hope of the glory of God...and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:1-5)

If there has not been a moment in your life when this love of God has moved from your head to your heart, I recommend you go on a silent retreat for a day. Don't do anything. Just detach yourself from your normal surroundings, the earthly voices that beckon you and belit-

tle you, and get away. Take your Bible and listen to God, and pray that he will reveal his love to you.

Perhaps you have already experienced such a moment, but you never have memorialized it. Without praise, life is incomplete. Write a poem of praise! "Who am I, O Lord, that you have brought me thus far?" People think my love for poetry comes because I was an English major in school. But the fact is, I was an economics major. I didn't write my first poem until I was forty. Then, I wrote because I had to. Appreciation was building up inside of me for God and for people who had touched me, and it just came out. I had to say it.

At our friends fiftieth wedding anniversary I thought of how much they meant to Emily and me. Years ago, immediately after the death of our son, they invited us into their home for dinner every week for a year. They wanted to help us in our grief. Their home became our home. That evening I felt an uncomfortable urge to speak, but I felt inadequate and embarrassed. I told God that I was in need of a sign. Then their son said to me, "Mr. Morgan, do you have something to say?" I choked. I could hardly speak. Finally, I took the microphone and said, "We love you." I gave some inarticulate details of that year when they ministered to us. How could I not speak in praise to a couple who had adopted us during our time of grief?

And how can we not speak to the One who severed his own soul and gave his Son to take us into his family, and gave us a future that will outlast history?

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