

## God's Promise to David

Passages: 2 Samuel 7:1–17

Luke 20:41–44

One of my favourite movies is “**Crocodile Dundee**,” and one of my favourite scenes in that movie is when Australian Mick Dundee is in New York City walking down the street with his American girl friend. Suddenly, from out of the shadows, a gang of thugs emerges. One of the hoodlums brandishes a knife and demands that Dundee hand over his possessions. Calmly, Dundee looks at the thugs before responding, “That's not a knife . . . **this** is a knife!” And he pulls out an incredibly large knife, which makes the would-be mugger’s switchblade look like a penknife as the thugs flee for their lives.

This scene reminds me of our text. David has just completed the construction of his palace. He looks out and sees the ark of the Lord, housed in a tent, and then begins to wonder. . . . A plan begins to formulate in his mind. Why not build a house for God, a temple? So David calls his friend and confidant, Nathan the prophet, and outlines his intentions. Nathan hastily consents, thinking that David's plans for such a “house” will be pleasing to God. But that night, Nathan is corrected by God, and he has to return to David with his revised prophetic evaluation. Through Nathan, God speaks to David. It is as though God were looking down at the blueprints which David had drawn up for God's “house.” God then looks at David and says, in effect, “David, that's not a house, . . . **this** is a house.” If David thinks he can build a house for God, he is wrong. **It is God who plans to build a “house” for David.**

**But...what sort of house?** The word ‘house’ (Heb. ‘bitu’) is found eight times in this passage (vv.1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13 and 16). But the meaning varies. When David uses the word, he is talking about either a royal palace (as in v.1) or a temple (v.2). David is contrasting the “house” he lives in with the fact that God only dwells in a tent. Hence, he wants to build God a “house” like his. But as we enter the text of Nathan’s oracle, a new understanding of the word ‘house’ becomes apparent.

Before we get to that, however, let's think a bit more about David's proposal to build a "house" for God. Is there anything fundamentally wrong with this idea? Well, our text reveals that God has at least **three** serious problems with David's scheme!

**First**, the idea of building a Temple for God is based on false presumptions! Once again, David has fallen into the age-old trap of thinking that human beings can do something for God...as if God is helpless without us! If you remember, he already made this mistake when he moved the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem—he thought he was helping God! That's why David never felt the need to consult God about it! He thought he was doing God a favour!

This presumptuous attitude toward God runs deep in David's heart; an attitude that is exacerbated by the fact that, while David is living in a palace, God is living in a tent. This makes David feel sorry for God! He wants to give God a helping hand! **But David is operating out of a totally incorrect understanding of God!** What a joke! It would be like me, all dressed up in my best outfit from Vinnies, looking at a newspaper clipping of Gina Rinehart in some dirty mining gear and thinking, "I should send her a gift certificate to buy herself some decent clothes!" My pity for Gina only comes out of my ignorance of her financial situation!

But there may be even more going on in this passage: Scholars suggest that one of the reasons why David wanted to build a house for God was to bring legitimacy to his own kingship! In the ancient world, every kingdom had its own god. But before that god could be considered legitimate, a proper temple would need to exist-- otherwise, that god would be considered to be inferior to the other gods of the region. For David, a Temple would legitimise Israel's god... which, in turn, would legitimise his kingship! David's desire to build a Temple was built on the false presumption that God was there simply to endorse David as king.

It is in reaction to David's presumptions that God speaks through the prophet Nathan. In verse 5, God tells Nathan to "**Go to my servant David.**" There's no mistaking that God uses this title to deliberately put David in his place! Then, God asks, "**Are you to build a house for Me to live in?**" It's clear that, in God's mind,

all of David's presumptions about building a Temple for God are false!

God's rebuke of David continues into verse 6. You see, it's not just the presumptions that David has made that God opposes. In this verse, God raises a **second** problem concerning the construction of a Temple: namely, that the construction of a Temple will actually promote a false idea of God's true nature! Throughout all of Israel's previous history, God was known to dwell in a Tabernacle—a mobile tent. This tent told a story a story about God! It told the world that the God of Israel was a mobile God...One who was always near to His people. A Temple, on the other hand, is a permanent structure—something immobile! It says to the world that that the God of Israel is stuck in one place. It says that God is also inflexible...unable to change and adapt to new situations. A Temple inevitably reflects the idea God is but a museum piece, stuck in an ancient time and an ancient place far from the contemporary issues of the day! That's the **second** reason why God was opposed to a Temple.

There's a **third** reason why God was opposed to a Temple. In verse 7, God simply says to David, **"I didn't ask for this!"** (**"In all my journeys with all the Israelites, have I ever asked : Why haven't you built me a house of cedar?"**) Ever since God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the only thing that God asked for was a Tabernacle. He specified how the tabernacle was to be constructed, how it was to be moved, and who was to care for it. The only thing that God had ever instructed the Israelites to build was the tabernacle—never did He ask for a temple. And if a temple were needed, surely God would have asked for one!

Now, remember that this discussion with David took place around 1000 years before Christ. And yet, when we come into New Testament times, this whole issue concerning the necessity of the Temple was still being debated! Of course, most Jews believed that the Temple was essential—without it, who would they be? They marvelled at its size and splendour. Even the disciples were mesmerised by the huge stones. They felt that it was the greatest piece of architecture on earth and that it, therefore, reflected God's greatness! For most Jews, it was the Temple that legitimated Israel's whole existence!

But not everyone felt this way! If you look at Acts 6 and 7, you'll see how Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks out against the Temple. Then, when he is dragged before the Sanhedrin, he boldly points out from the Old Testament how God, Himself, had never been impressed with the Temple! Stephen argues that, although David's son, Solomon, may have built the Temple for God, it was based on a huge misunderstanding about God's nature! God never wanted to be confined, like some trophy, to a temple—for God's nature is to be on the move! This mobility was perfectly reflected in God's ultimate grand design-- **the tabernacle**. The Temple, says Stephen, was all David's idea... and cruelly completed by Solomon. To make his point, Stephen concludes his argument (in vv 49–50) by quoting from the Book of Isaiah: **This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting-place be? <sup>2</sup> Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?' declares the LORD. (Is 66:1–2)**

Of course, as a result of this speech, Stephen got stoned to death! That's how much the Temple meant to the Jews!

But, I've brought in Stephen's argument against the temple in Acts 7 to bolster our understanding of 2 Samuel 7! **God never needed, nor did He ask for, a temple to be built for Him.** It was the tabernacle that ideally reflected the nature of God; not the Temple! In fact, the whole point of 2 Samuel 7 was to make it clear that **David** was **not** going to build a house for **God**. Rather, it would be **God** who would build a house for **David**. That's why, throughout verses 8 to 11, the pronoun **"I"** is repeatedly found, referring to God. It is God who is the first-person subject of twenty-three verbs in this message! In other words, it is God who is the instigator of all the action that follows. God is going to build a House for David!

But... what sort of a house will He build? The answer is found in verses 11–16.

**“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: <sup>12</sup> when your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He is the one who will build a house for my Name,**

and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands.<sup>15</sup> But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”

As you can see, the house that God will build for David is not an architectural structure at all! It's a household...a lineage...a genealogy...an unending line of descendants. Verse 16 makes it clear: **“You house and kingdom will endure forever before me ...”**

And, even when God says (in verse 13) that David's son, Solomon, will have a key role to play in the construction of this house (**“He is the one who will build a house for my Name”**), it's clear that God is still not talking about the building of a Temple. Solomon will become an agent in God's construction plans! As the first of David's descendant, God will use him to build the house of David. For this reason, Solomon will enjoy a very unique and privileged relationship with God. In verse 14, God says, **“I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me.”** Of course, these words do not only refer to Solomon—they apply to Solomon's son and the sons who come after him. For the underlying truth is that **God is raising up a house...a dynastic line** known as the “sons of David” who, in God's grace, will also be privileged to be known as the **“sons of God”**.

And that leads us to the New Testament...and to the greatest “son of David” who has ever walked this earth. As the hymn-writer put it, He is **“great David's greater son!”**... none other than our Lord, Jesus Christ. According to his genealogy in Matthew and Luke, Jesus is a true “son of David”. But more important is the fact that, according to the voice from heaven at His baptism and transfiguration, He is also the true “Son of God”, whose kingdom will never end!

Now, do you get it? Jesus, the true Son of David, is the one in whom God's promises to David are finally fulfilled; He is the one whose reign and Kingdom are both universal and eternal!

And that's not all. It is in this **Son of David...this Son of God...** that we now find our own "**sonship**"! Regardless of whether you're a man or a woman, when we come to Jesus by faith, we are included in God's promise to David! Through Him, we are given the privilege to be called "the **sons** of God", and in that sonship, we are called to reign with Jesus in His glory!

Now, are there any lessons we can learn from this story? I've got three:

The **first lesson** we must learn is that, like David, it's very easy to get caught up in the idea that we are doing something for God, when, in actual fact, it is God who has done, and is doing, something for us.

I went to hear Bishop Ben Kwashi from Jos, Nigeria, speak last Tuesday evening. He spoke about the church in northern Nigeria and the constant threat that Christians live under from Islamic extremists. He said us something I shall never forget—"So often here in the West, Christians go to church thinking they are doing God a favour. After all, there are so many options on a Sunday—you could do numerous things. And so, when you go to church, it's easy to think, "I'm doing God a favour!"

But then the Bishop said this: "In Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Iran...it's impossible to have this attitude. Every time you go to church, you are risking your life! You never know when a bomb might go off, or a terrorist might break in. Churches are targets! And so, you can't go to church thinking you're doing God a favour. No, you only go to church because you know you need Him to do you a favour! That's why you join each Sunday with the Lord's people... to keep being reminded of all that God has done for us!

This leads us to a **second lesson**: **No matter how high and lofty our goals and plans may be, God's plans are always greater.** David had plans to build a house for God. He thought his plans

were magnificent-- a house of cedar! Little did he know that God had bigger plans for him...far bigger plans! God was going to build a **“house”** for David!

Whenever we think we are doing God a favour, let us remind ourselves of what God has already done in His Son, Jesus Christ. Nothing we can do will ever compare to the grace and the forgiveness that is found in His death and resurrection. Moreover, whenever we fall into the trap of thinking that we are building a Temple for God, let us remember that, in Jesus and by His Spirit, **it is God who is creating His own Temple...**a temple made without hands...a temple made up of a multitude of “living stones”...like you and me... gathered together to radiate with His glory.

Peter writes, **“And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”** (1 Peter 2:4–5) We are the temple that God is building...a temple not made with human hands. This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvellous in our eyes!

There’s a **third** lesson that follows on from this. **We make a huge mistake when we think that God needs to be “housed” in spectacular buildings or magnificent programs!** The temple that David wanted to build was going to be the greatest building ever constructed by man. That was David’s idea, built on the premise that God needed something spectacular.

How often do we fall into that same trap. I’ve heard Christian leaders tell their congregations that God expects only our best, and that to do anything less is to denigrate God’s name. They say this in reference to a building program or the worship team. They say this in order to motivate bigger and better things for God, as if God not only deserves the best but He won’t be satisfied with anything less. As a result of this thinking, we build lavish, modern church structures with the greatest in hi-tech lighting. We pay huge money for powerful sound systems in order to have the greatest worship music...all in the name of, “God deserves the

best!" We, then, expect God to be pleased with the spectacular environment that we have built for Him!

We are so mistaken! The true glory of God has no need of our constructed surroundings. He prefers a tabernacle; He prefers to dwell among us, to move amongst the poor and the lowly, the contrite and the broken.

Indeed, the New Testament focus is never on man-made structures! It is on the building...the Temple...that the Lord, Himself, is building! It is on the body of Christ, the believers that God is gathering together as His living stones! All this should remind us that God's glory is not to be found in the spectacular, but in the ordinary and everyday...in the broken and the hurting... the lonely and the frustrated... wherever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name.

David's idea of building a house for God was a mistake. It was God who was going to build a house for David. The same is true for us, today! **God is the only true builder! And the building HE is constructing is far more glorious than we could have ever asked for or imagined!**

**Let's pray.**