God's Covenant with David
2 Samuel 7

We're looking at the life of David and today we're going to look at an episode in David's life that probably lasted no more than 24 hours, max, and yet theologians describe it as 'the most important chapter' of David's life, indeed, 'one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible', the importance of which 'continues to shape history today.' Meaning that an event of a few hours duration, 3000 years ago, impacts your life today.

And that event is God's covenant with David.

Reading: 2 Samuel 7

We're going to look at three things: Good ideas v God ideas; No Greater Giver; and finally Grace and Glory.

Good Ideas, God Ideas
Look at v1, 'Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies…'

So David's king in Jerusalem, and he's been victorious in battle, and there's peace in the land. But David's a bit like many of you. He's a bit of an A-type personality; he's a do-er. And in his new found ease and comfort, he's a bit restless. And golf hasn't been invented yet, so he can't take up golf, so he looks for the next thing to do. And as he walks around his palace grounds he sees the Tent, the Tabernacle of the ark of the covenant. And it begins to gnaw at him.

Because here he is, living in comfort, in his palace, whilst God is camping out in the garden. He's living like a king and God is living like a refugee. And to David that's just wrong.

Also, in Deuteronomy 12 God had said that a time would come when Israel would have rest from their enemies - same words as v1 - and that would be the time to centralise Israel's worship in one place. So maybe David's thinking, that time has come - we're at peace, so it's time to build God a temple. Time to build God a palace.

And Nathan, the prophet, thinks that's a great idea: v3, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you." He's like a pastor, isn't he! 'You want to give to a church building project? Sounds good to me! Let me give you my bank details!' The only problem is that Nathan obviously didn't pray about it. Until, that is, he was alone with God that night. Verse 4, 'But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan…'

And this interaction between David and Nathan tells us that you can have a seemingly, or genuinely good idea that's not necessarily a God idea. That you can be active and doing, but God isn't in it - no matter how spiritual it seems.

You see, there are at least two dangers in temple building. Firstly, you can want God to have *almost* all the glory. When I was a medical student I was posted to a part of England that had been famous for its sheep farming and wool trade. And in multiple small villages there are these massive, magnificent churches, the size of small cathedrals, that even when they were first built, were far too big for the villages they served. And they were built by wealthy wool merchants, with plaques inside that read, 'this church was built to the glory of God and in memory of Mr X' - the merchant.

But as you look at them, you get the feeling that this may have been more to do with building something to the glory of Mr X, not God, especially as it's bigger than Mr Y's effort down the road.

But, it doesn't have to be a temple or a church does it? The Book of Genesis tells us that the Tower of Babel, the very first skyscraper, was built to 'make a name for ourselves' (Genesis 11:4). It was the original Trump Tower. And ever since, we've been wanting to build our reputation, or little empire, or legacy, or, if you're a pastor, your church. And there may be a veneer, even a thick veneer, of wanting God to have the glory - but it's *almost* all the glory.

AW Tozer, the American pastor, once preached a sermon called 'the five keys to the faithful Christian life'. No. 1 - always deal thoroughly with sin; no 2. - never own anything - or don't let anything own you; no 3. - don't gossip; no 4. - never defend yourself, and no. 5… Never take God's glory. And temple, or empire, or reputation building comes with just that temptation.

But the second danger of temple building is that it can be about putting God in your debt. And the kings of the surrounding nations would build temples to their gods to earn the gods' favour. Do something for the god and he will do something for you.

But that's the very heart of religion, isn't it? Do something good for God and it will go well for you, God will bless you. Give your money to church, go to church - at least once a month - or if you're really holy, double shift - go on a missions trip, tell others about Jesus, do family devotions, make your kids listen to Christian music - and I'll put myself in God's good books, and he'll owe me, and have to return the favour. But it's not just religion is it? Even some of our modern secular beliefs have this at their core: 'If I live a good life, if I recycle, and eat organic, and support a charity in Africa, then I'll feel good about myself, I'll have good karma.'

So religious or not, in all our doing, in our restlessness, there can be this underlying need to prove ourselves, to ourselves, to others, and to God.

And the Lord wastes no time in telling Nathan he's read this wrong. Verse 4 again, 'But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan…'

Now, how do you respond when God says 'no' to your plans? When he closes a door in your face? Or when the Bible, his word, seems to hem you in, and it tells you that you, or your friend, can't do the thing you want to do or live the way you want to live? We'll see how David responds in a minute, but how do you respond?

You see, God's 'no' to David tells us two things. Firstly, even though society might tell you it is, or you think it is, God's 'no' to you is not a personal rejection. But secondly, God's 'no' to David tells us that God's best for you may well come through his 'no'. God may just be working his best for you through a closed door rather than an open one; through a good idea that dies, rather than one that flies; through his word telling you, 'no a Christian doesn't behave like that' - rather than an 'anything goes' mentality.

You see, what David discovers is that any good idea he ever had about doing something for God, is dwarfed by God's ideas of what he's going to do for David.

No Greater Giver

Look at v5, as God says to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: would you build me a house to dwell in?" So God's not looking out from behind the net curtain of heaven's front room, envious that he hasn't got a nice new cedar house like David's, is he? He's not looking down from the splendour of his glory, pouting, thinking 'if only David would give me some money I could have a wooden house too.'

It's as if he's saying to David, 'David, I'm not like some charitable cause in need of donations; I'm not a start-up in need of financial backers; I'm not a politician lobbying for your support.' Instead he reminds David that God is the greatest giver and David, and you and I, are always the receivers.

And he reminds David that just like he had brought Israel up out of slavery in Egypt, so, v8, 'I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep.' And just like he had been with Israel wherever they went, so, v9, 'I have been with you wherever you went.' And David may be a great military strategist, but the only reason he's enjoying peace now is that God, v9, has 'cut off all your enemies from before you.' In other words, David, I'm the builder - I'm the builder of lives and reputations.

Now, we love a good rags-to-riches story, don't we? The underdog who makes it! The multi-million CEO who started out living in a car; the top flight politician born to a single mum the wrong sides of the tracks. But God's message to David is this reminder, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, 'What do you have that you did not receive?' (4:7). You see, so many of the things that mark us out for success: your IQ, your psychological make-up, the family you were born in to, the breaks you got, had absolutely nothing to do with you. Instead, it was if there was a mover and a builder behind the scenes of your life.

And yet, it's not even as if now that David has made it, thanks to God, it's time for him to payback the favour - is it. Instead, God promises that he will make David even greater still. Verse 9, "I will make for you a great name." And that's not God promising a few moments of glory on the stage of ancient Israel's X-factor. This is God promising something to David that will extend past David's lifetime, and etch his name on history.

You know the irony of the builders of the Tower of Babel, and multiple temple and tower and empire builders since? It's that they they die forgotten, in all but negative ways. Because true greatness never comes with wanting it, does it? But in the very next chapter after Babel, God takes a previously unknown man, Abraham, and promises him "I will make your name great" (12:2). Because true greatness comes with that humbling realisation that the hand of Another has taken hold of you and made you what you are. And now, here, in God's promise to David, that promise to Abraham is being focused down on Israel's king.

And then God promises David that, v11, "I will give you rest from all your enemies." Now, in the description of the seven days of creation in Genesis, the seventh day, the day on which God rested, is the only day that doesn't end with the formula, 'and there was evening and there was morning' and the implication is that the Sabbath rest of God is ongoing, the seventh day continues, and God invites everyone of us to enter it. To rest from our striving and fighting for a reputation, to rest from our trying to prove ourselves or earn God's favour. To find rest from the enemies of our souls.

You see when God promises restless David rest, he's promising him peace in the land, a peace that points to a greater and more lasting peace.

Because, if David wants to build the Lord a house, look again at what God says to David, v11: “Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.” And he doesn’t mean a nice new palace, does he? He means a royal line, a dynasty. And not like a British royal house that needs the French or the Germans to come and replenish it, but one that will last forever. Verse 16, “Your throne will be established forever.”

And that line will begin with David’s son, Solomon. And he, v13, “shall build a house for my name.” And God says he will be like a father to David’s son, and he will be like a son to God. And when he messes up, and screws up, God will discipline him, but not destroy him: v15, “But my steadfast love will not depart from him.” So, not even the train wrecks of David’s descendants that will follow will make God withdraw his promise or derail his purpose.

But, there will be plenty of occasions in the years to come when Israel might look at the mess they’re in and wonder, ‘really? Is God’s promise really trustworthy, or are we just kidding ourselves?’ Because, sure, Solomon’s reign begins in glory, but it ends in failure. And as for enduring peace, by David’s grandson the nation splits in civil war. And Israel is annihilated by the Assyrians and Judah is carried off into exile by the Babylonians, and Solomon’s temple is destroyed; and from 500 BC on there is no king in the line of David to sit upon the throne of Israel, even if Israel had a throne to sit on.

And sometimes, when life is disintegrating, it can feel the same, can’t it? And you can look at the promises of God - that he works all things for good for those that love him; that he promises you good and not harm; that his plans are to prosper not to harm you, and you can be tempted to think: Really? Or am I just kidding myself? Can I really stand on this? Because right now my life is telling me ‘I don’t think so.’

But God’s promise to David tells you that you can. Because, as Paul says, all God’s promises are ‘yes' in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). And God promised that his steadfast, never-ending, never-running out love, would never be removed from the house of David. And right when things seemed at their worst - when an enemy occupied the land, when a foreigner, Herod, was on the throne, when it seemed like you’d be justified in pulling the plug on faith in God’s promises, an angel came to a young woman in the line of David, and just listen for the echoes of God’s promise to David: Luke 1:31-33, “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And God’s promise finally comes to full fruition as Mary gives birth to a son in a stable, in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David.

And if David wanted to build a house for God to dwell in, the Lord Jesus became the ultimate temple: the one in whom God dwelt bodily. And if David wanted to build a palace for God, the Son of God left his palace, and as John says in his gospel, pitched his tent among us, so that one day we could dwell in his palace.

And here, God promises to cut off David’s enemies and give him rest. But as we’ll see in the weeks to come, David’s greatest enemies weren’t the Philistines - they were the sin and death that threatened his family, his throne, his relationship with God and those he was supposed to protect, and his life. The very things that threaten us.

So how does God cut off those ultimate enemies? And the answer is by becoming sin and by taking on death and defeating them. Because here, God promises that when David's sons sin, he will punish them as a father. And at the cross Jesus bore the Father's punishment, but not for his iniquity, for ours. He bore the rod and the stripes that were ours to bear. And he was cut off that we never should be. And in rising again he crushed those enemies. And in pouring out his Spirit into our hearts he makes us into the temple, the very house of God that David wanted to build.

And he gives us rest. You see, if David is restless, what about you and me, and our restless working, our needing to prove ourselves? But Jesus' sacrifice is the end of all that, because it tells you, you are accepted, you're loved, not because of the temple or empire or reputation you've built, but because of Christ.

And so, Christianity is poles apart from the religion that says, you've got to do, you've got to build, you've got to earn. In Christ God says, 'Would you build me a house? Let me build you a house. Let me welcome you into my house and my rest.' The rest of the unconditional love and grace of God. Because that's what David does.

Grace and Glory

Verse 18, 'Then King David went in and sat before the Lord.' So this episode that begins with David wanting to *do*, ends with him sitting. And sitting before God in the very tent he wanted to replace. And the man who wanted to be builder-in-chief sits in awe before the builder of all things. Restless David find rests in all that God has done and will yet do for him. It's the awe-filled rest that all of us can know in Christ.

And yet David doesn't do nothing, does he? In fact, in some ways, things only begin to get going for David once he sits down, once he lets go of his plans and drinks deeply of God's plans.

You see, when God's grace to you sinks in, it does two things.

Firstly, it humbles you to worship and life-laying down service, so that what you do, you do for the glory of Another. After all, did you notice how - and how often - David addresses God as he sits there? Time and again he calls him, 'O Lord God' (v18, 19, 20, 22, 25, 28, 29) - literally, O adonai YHWH, O Lord Lord, O master Lord. Gone is all the talk of what David wants to do, now it's all about God and how great he is. And in comparison he refers to himself, repeatedly, as 'your servant' (v19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29). And David could have listed any number of reasons why he deserved to have God honour him couldn't he? I mean, there's his poetry, and his bravery, and his life long loyalty to Saul, and he's made Israel great again - surely he deserves a gong, or a medal or an accolade or two? But David makes zero mention of any of those. Instead he begins, v18, by saying, "Who am I, O Lord God… that you have brought me thus far?"

You see, grace humbles you, because you see God as he really is - the great giver, and you as you really are, the one who gets to receive. And that results in greater depths of worship. But it also results in acts of service. Because, whilst David never does build the temple, he does draw up plans, and collects materials, and encourages others to do it. But in doing that he's ensuring it's God's name that's glorified, not his.

And understanding God's grace to you in Christ does the same. In his letter to the Romans Paul spends the first 11 chapters spelling out God's grace and then he starts chapter 12, and says, 'Therefore, in view of God's mercy, present your *bodies* as living sacrifices.' (Rom 12:1) - not present a religious act, once a week, but present your bodies, your whole life, every aspect of it, to God as a living sacrifice, not to earn God's favour, but because of God's favour. Not out of a need to prove yourself, but out of awe-filled, worship-filled gratitude for grace. Because when you know that God doesn't need you, that's when he can start to use you.

But if grace humbles you, it also makes you bold. Look at v25: as David prays, "And now, O Lord God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken." Hang on! That's David, the servant, telling his master - the God of everything - what to do! Where does he get that kind of audacity from, when he knows he's nothing? Verse 27, 'For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' *Therefore* your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you."

You see, David isn't ordering God about because he thinks he, David, is some big shot. The basis of David's boldness, his courage before God, is God's totally undeserved grace to him. It's precisely because God's promise doesn't depend on David that David can be so confident before God. Think that your standing before God depends on you, and you'll never be certain - you'll never know, 'have I done enough?' But know that God loves you and has chosen you by grace, because of Jesus, and you'll be humble and bold. You'll worship with awe and pray with faith. You'll serve God and others and do those things that require courage. Because you know that grace is the ground you stand on.