

“No One Like You”

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This forever plan is not about David. It's about God.

2 Samuel 7:18-29

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Royal power

If you are able, please remain standing for a moment. Today we begin with the subject of royalty. I'll invite you to sit in just a couple of minutes. Meanwhile, as you undoubtedly know, royalty has dominated the news the last three days. In my family of origin, it has also dominated the text messages and emails. We're a bit obsessed.

Perhaps the most unforgettable words of Queen Elizabeth were those uttered on her 21st birthday. They were quoted often this week including by the new monarch, her son, King Charles III: "I declare before you all, that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of that great imperial family to which we all belong." Even more remarkable than that she spoke them is that 75 years later her family and indeed the entire world says she kept that promise.

By contrast, here are words written by Tiglath Pileser II of Assyria I, who lived about three centuries after King David of Israel. Archaeologists have discovered all sorts of carvings and descriptions from this king who ruled only 18 years. In the carvings he's represented as larger than others, better dressed, and very much in control.

Tiglath Pileser III, the Great King, the Mighty King, King of the universe, King of Assyria, King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four regions of the world, the brave hero, who with the help of Asshur his lord smashed all who did not obey him like pots and laid them low like a hurricane scattering them to the winds.

Tiglath is the prototype for power as control, and control by any means.
Elizabeth is the prototype for power as service.

Without God's active intervention on multiple occasions I am convinced that King David would have become a Tiglath, not an Elizabeth. David's successes and expansions are inevitably followed by humiliating failures. At times he has no one to blame but himself, and at other times when someone else is humbling David the timing and situation leave no doubt that God is keeping David's ego under control. In retrospect David will be seen as a great king, but a great king with an even greater God.

Royal prayer

David's prayer can be summarized in three words: sit, wow, and yes.

Sit. "Then King David went in and sat before the LORD." This might be the most important part of David's prayer (vv. 18-21) in 2 Samuel 7. You may be seated.

Let's sit for a moment in quiet. Close your eyes or leave them open. Use words or not. Consider a specific blessing of the Lord or a need. Most importantly, sit.

We're not told for how long or where David sat or who was with him. My hunch is that David left his brand new palace crafted from Jerusalem limestone and imported cedar and went into the tent where he had placed the Ark of the Covenant. Then, overwhelmed, he just sat. Maybe for minutes, maybe for hours. The point is not the posture. He could have stood or lain prostrate. The point is "before the LORD."

When he finally spoke, we have a sense of what he was thinking about when he sat. "Who am I, Sovereign LORD," he asks, "and what is my family that you have brought me this far?" David is responding to what God had told him through Nathan the prophet: "You were a shepherd, and I made you a king."

When you find yourself in a place of privilege and power, it's easy to forget where you came from. Unless you came to that place unethically, it's not that you need to feel guilty about where are – but you do need to remember you didn't come there on your own. The narrator of 1 and 2 Samuel takes great pains to ratify the legitimacy of David's rule. He didn't end Saul's rule or his life, even when he had the chance. But he's still a nobody who became a somebody because God chose him.

So are you and so am I. If you woke up this morning, it's by grace. If you have family, it's by grace. If you have food on the table and clothes to wear, it's by grace. If you drive a car or live in a house – and the nicer the car and the house it's even more true – you just need to sit and ask, "Who am I?" And if you have come to know Jesus and to experience the peace and promise only he gives by his life and death and resurrection, you just need to sit in his presence and ask, "Who am I?"

It wasn't just that David was a shepherd. He has already shown himself to be unworthy. He's already a man with a harem, with blood on his hands, with seasons of his life where he took matters into his own hands because God didn't come through.

Life is humbling. Our sins are humbling. “Who am I that the Lord of all the earth would care to know my name, would care to feel my hurt? I am yours.” (Casting Crowns)

As he did for David, God has spoken not only about our present but about the future. And he has done it, as David said, “for the sake of (his) word and according to (his) will.”

Wow. David then turns to who God is. What kind of God would take someone like me and give him blessings in the present and promises for a forever future? What kind of God even knows the future?

The *Wow* part of David’s prayer (22-24) begins with God’s incomparability which leads to God’s uniqueness. “Because there is no god like you,” David says, “there is no God but you.” Further, “There is no people like your people Israel.”

He rehearses the history of the nation, from the Egypt to Canaan. God performed “great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods.” David continues, “You have established your people Israel as your very own forever.”

It’s not just what God has done for me. It’s what God has done for us. As I move toward the sunset of my time as Corinth’s pastor, I find myself not only humbled by what God has done for me, but what he has done for us. Not just “us” as in Linda and me, but “us” as in you and us. But more than that, what he has done for “us” as in The Church of Jesus. What an amazing thing we’re part of – spanning the globe and the centuries.

Who is like this God who suffers long through the generations of failures and injustices perpetrated by or ignored by Christians and the church – from inhumane punishments to crusades to slavery to the Holocaust – and still we are here? He’s a God of grace who still works in and through people like you and me. He’s a great God who can overcome and redeem and restart his people and his plan.

Yes. The third part of David’s prayer (25-29) is submission. It is his “Yes” to God. I wondered at the beginning of the week why David says, “And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you made.” Having just expressed his “Wow” of who God is, why does David think God needs a reminder from the one sitting before him? Why does David keep using the word “promise” as if to say to God, “You promised, now please don’t let me down, OK?”

The word that drives the end of his prayer is not “promise” but “servant.” Seven times in five verses David refers to himself before God as “your servant.” David had dreamed of the biggest project he could imagine for God’s sake – building a temple. Other ancient near eastern rulers, Tiglath included, commonly built palaces and temples next to each other. Usually the palace first in a secure place, and then an adjacent temple. On one level it seemed like they were giving credit to their god for their

success, but in reality they were giving credit to themselves for their ability to construct such a marvelous worship center. It really wasn't about their god; it was about them.

God tells David no. We can make this a lesson about when God says no to our prayers, but in reality it's a much bigger lesson than that. It's not just about God saying "No" to one prayer of David. It's about David saying to God, "I am your servant." In this and every prayer I make, it's not about me trying to find a way for you to say "Yes" to me; it's about every prayer of mine expressing "Yes" to you.

David realizes that God's purposes are bigger than David's life, that God's name (not David's) is what matters, that people need to say, "The LORD Almighty is God over Israel." God has made a covenant, which is his prerogative. David is releasing his dream for greatness. Do you hear that in his prayer? It's not about David being great. That would happen if David could unify and expand the kingdom and take Jerusalem and build a palace and bring the ark into the City of David and build a great temple. God says, "Let's put a pause on your dreams. Not you, not now." And David realizes this plan of God, this forever plan, makes it all about God and not about David.

And he says, "Yes."

Sacred Pathways

I like this David. I love this prayer of David. He's not "claiming a promise," like we often say we are when we pick out a favorite Bible verse. This a grand plan, The Plan, The Story, what God does in space and time so he can fulfill his purpose in eternity.

This prayer is appropriate for times of national remembrance, like 9-11. Or when the Queen dies. Or the King begins to reign. Or times of national celebration.

It is appropriate for whatever is happening in your life. Like Confirmation. Or death. Or a baby. A promotion or a demotion. A retirement or a transition. A success or a disappointment. This is what prayer is. If you can't remember long application points of a sermon, you only have to remember three words: sit, wow, and yes.

The book we assigned our summer Confirmands was Gary Thomas' *Sacred Pathways: Nine Ways to Connect with God*. It's probably a bit above a teenage level, but I hope they'll keep it and read it again later in life. We all connect to God in different ways – some in nature, others with their senses or their minds or their activism or their care. God has created us with such diversity of experience and personality.

David himself seems to employ many of those sacred pathways. He loves the outdoors, loves to dance, takes action, loves being with people, thrives on being alone, writes poetry and songs. In this instance, he just sits. And wows. And yeses. I like this David. He's humble. God is real and present. He wants to be for you as well. Amen.