

“A Love That Will Never Be Taken Away”

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11/5/23

What is the best thing that has happened to you in the last month or so?

For me, it was a date Kristy and I went on to a friend’s wedding in Virginia. We sat with friends we hadn’t seen in ages, we ate good food, told stories, showed pictures of our kids, and danced together in the silly ways we like to dance together.

It was a great night. What was yours? Was it a wedding or a promotion? Was it time with family or a success at work? All of these kinds of things make for great moments.

Jon Acuff, an author I love, in his recent book encouraged his readers to make a list of their best moments from their life and I have been doing that, making a best moments list. And on my list are small things that I love like the taste of ice cold sparkling water on a hot day. And then medium sized things, like the day I found a pair of shoes that actually fit my feet. I was 32 years old and I had no idea shoes could feel like that. And then the big moments, my wedding day, finding out we were pregnant with Ryan, and the feeling of graduating from seminary. What would be on your best moments list?

As we look at our passage today, we are looking together at 2 Samuel 7 and what one commentary describes as “one of the most crucial texts in the Old Testament.” What another called, “the ‘ideological summit’ of the entire Old Testament.” This passage is one of the best moments of the Old Testament and an experience that would have made David’s best moments list.

First, *After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him,*

This is a short introduction to our story, but this moment in David’s life where he was settled comfortably on the throne, having experienced victory over all his enemies was a long time coming.

David had not had an easy life. If you aren’t familiar with David’s story, here are some highlights

David was born in Bethlehem and was the grandson of Obed, who if you were here last week, was the son given to Ruth and Boaz, who pointed to Jesus by acting as a kinsman redeemer.

David grew up during the reign of Israel’s first king, Saul. Saul was tall, handsome, and a great military leader of God’s own choosing. Saul had God’s blessing, until Saul refused to listen to God and went his own way.

God withdrew his love from Saul and had Samuel anoint David as an early teenager to be the next king – not because of his credentials, he was the youngest of Jesse’s 8 sons. He was just a shepherd boy, but David was God’s choice. This anointing was a secret from Saul and the rest of Israel.

David is perhaps most famous for defeating Goliath. If you remember, he goes into mortal combat against the Philistine’s greatest champion, a giant, saying, *“Goliath, you come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands.”* And David with one well placed stone killed Goliath and won favor in Israel and with Saul.

David went on to become a great officer in the army. And for over a decade, whatever mission Saul sent David on, he was successful. Again, everyone liked him and thought well of him and that ultimately got him in trouble. The women of the towns made up a song about David singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." And this enraged Saul.

So much so that David would spend the next 4 years of his life on the run from Saul. Saul's jealousy turned David, a friend and hero, into an enemy. David did not have an easy life.

When Saul died, David was living in exile. David returned home and claimed his title of king, but was met with a competing claim to the throne by Saul's son and there were years of civil war followed by years of war with the Philistines and the Jebusites.

Finally, 7 and a half years into his reign as king, David took up residence in Jerusalem and could finally rest on his throne in peace. In all, it has been over 22 years of war, running for his life, and battles. To be settled in his palace and resting from his enemies, must have been wonderful and strange to David. And it is then, as he is resting in his palace, happy but maybe a little bored, that he realizes just how nice his house is and how plain the tent housing the ark of the covenant was.

This reminds me of COVID a little. We were all sitting at home for long periods of time and it was strange. During that time at home I noticed things I had never seen before at my house. Did anyone else come up with a long list of house projects during quarantine? Until COVID, it never bothered me that instead of a door to our laundry room, we just had a 40 year old curtain hanging up, it bothered my wife, but it never bothered me, until quarantine. Ultimately my friend Adam helped me build and install a barn door to replace that old faded curtain. I imagine that was it was like for David when *2 he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."*

A house of cedar did not mean a wood house, but rather a stone building with wood paneling on the inside, very much like this sanctuary. This building is a building of stone and steel, but the inside is beautifully crafted wood. That is what David's house was like and the ark of God remained in a tent, or more literally in the Hebrew, in a curtain. God was living in a house of old curtains.

Nathan here is given almost no introduction. All we are told is that he is a prophet. A prophet in the bible is someone who had an experience of God who was then commissioned to speak on God's behalf. His job was to represent God to the king and to Israel. To speak for God and Nathan does. Nathan is a gift to David. He is a spiritual friend, one of those people in David's life who helped him listen to God and do what God said. We all need friends like that.

*3 Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."*

David clearly has in mind to make a better house for God and to Nathan this seemed like a great and beautiful thing to do. It makes sense. And this phrase, "The Lord is with you," appears over and over in the stories of David. It was clear to everyone that had seen David's not easy life, that God was with him.

*4 But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:*

*5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. 7 Wherever I have moved with all the*

*Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"*

That same night, God spoke to Nathan in a dream. And this is such a kindness from God. Nathan was right that God was with David and Nathan gives David great everyday advice. Whatever good thing you want to do in God's name, do it.

I have given this same advice 3 different times in the last 3 months as people in our church have come to me with ideas of new ministries or classes to start. When people come to my office and tell me about how God has changed their lives and how they want to help other people experience the love of God like they have, I am excited to say yes. Those are the good days as a pastor and I imagine as a prophet.

But this day, God had something else in mind. This was not a "normal" day for "normal" good advice. God had a much, much better idea for the future than David had. So in verses 5-7, God sets the stage for this new future by saying Nathan "Go and tell my servant David." Note, David may be king, women may sing songs about him in the streets, but is still just a servant, though a loved servant of God.

God asks, "Are you to build me a house?" Are you greater than all the people who have come before you? I have had many servants in the hundreds of years since I led the people out of Egypt and not once have I asked for a house.

God says, I have always chosen to live with my people wherever they have gone. God chose his housing in the tent and has never asked for anything else. God chose to be present with his people and to go with them. The story of the bible is God moving toward people, trying to live with them.

*8 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you.*

David has been brought to this moment, to this royal position by God. These two verses are a gift to David and those of us who read his story. There is no place in David's life for the illusion of self-sufficiency. God has been so clearly at work in David's life. Nathan knew it. David knew it. Everyone knew it. David is a king resting on his throne because of God.

It is no different for us. When you look back over your best moments list, those moments did not just happen. The relationships, the experiences, the accomplishments are the result of God at work in your life. To attempt to be self-sufficient, to make a life for yourself apart from the input of God is a fool's errand. Self-sufficiency is an illusion.

Again, God does not need anything from David. Anything David could give God would only be what God had given David. The tone is kind and clear. I have been very kind to you. I have given you all that you have. And now God says I have brought you to this great moment and I have even more I want to give you.

These next few verses are the turning point of David's life and of the whole Old Testament

*Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning 11 and have*

*done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.*

God says, you may be famous here in the hill country, but I will make your name great, like the greatest of men on earth. And God has done that. 3,000 years later, here on the other side of the world, we still name our kids David. His name has become great.

God said I will provide a safe home for my people Israel. I will protect them from wicked people and give them rest from all their enemies. This hints at the Hebrew idea of shalom, where all is well, where physically, relationally, and in every other way, all is well. And while David experiences some of that in his day, and Israel under Solomon's leadership and off and on through the centuries, it seems especially poignant today to recognize that not all is with the people of Israel, all is not well in Gaza.

1,000's of people have died and more than 200 people have been taken hostage. And because our text and current events connect so closely, I would like to take a minute in the middle of this sermon to pray. Will you pray with me?

Jesus, people in Israel and in Palestine, people you love are dying. Lord have mercy. Thousands of people are living in fear of violence. Lord have mercy. Terror and evil are very present. Jesus, please bring an end to terror and violence. Bring rest and peace and safety. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Back to 2 Samuel, our passage culminates this way

*"The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you:*

God says I will establish a house for you. This is a play on the word house in Hebrew. The Hebrew word for house, bayit can mean physical structure like a house, a palace, or a temple and it can be used to mean a "house" like a family or a dynasty. Bayit is used 15 times in this chapter. David sitting in his house offers to build God a house, but instead God says He will build David a house, a dynasty, a family.

When David's life is over, his offspring will rule Israel and build God a house. Not only that but David's lineage will never end. His family will go on forever. Imagine if you are a parent or a grandparent and God says to you that your kids will have kids and their kids will have kids and your family will continue without end until the new creation. That is a beautiful promise, but it doesn't stop there.

God promises David shalom, a safe home, and a great big family, and then this: a love that will never be taken away.

*Verse 14 says 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. 15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you.*

God says, in this moment, I am establishing a different kind of relationship with you and your offspring. I will be their father, and they will be my sons. Now of course, your offspring will do wrong and I will punish them, But my love will never be taken away from them, as I took it away from Saul.

These words, this new kind of relationship is a beautiful revelation in the history of the world.

Up until this point in the Old Testament, relationships with God were primarily relationships of "if." If you do what God says, you will receive His presence and blessing. But this is something new entirely.

This idea, this promise of relationship that can't be interrupted by wrongdoing, a relationship like a father and a son, one where love will never be taken away, is brand new.

I think in every relationship there is a time when you can find out something new about someone and you can walk away. But like in our best friendships or in our best family relationships, there is nothing that person can do to keep you from loving them. There is a point in relationships where you can opt out, but God is saying to David, with you and your family, we have passed that point. Whatever you do, good or bad, I am with you. I will never take my love away. This was brand new in history.

Verse 16 says, *"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."* These promises were for David, and Solomon, his children, and Israel, but also this passage points ahead to Jesus. Jesus was always the plan and it was through Jesus that David's family and kingdom will endure forever.

The New Testament actually begins with these words *This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David...*

Jesus is the long awaited King of David's line, whose kingdom will endure forever. In 2 Samuel, God promised David a safe place to live and flourish, He promised a family that will never end, and love that will never be taken away. And with Jesus, this offer is made to you and me. Jesus is the long awaited king who is a son to God who will rule forever. And Jesus offers us his home to live in, with His eternal family to be a part of, and to receive the love of God that our sin and wrongdoing cannot negate.

A home, a family, and love that will never be taken away.

That is what was promised to David and that is what we are offered by Jesus. Do you know that because of Jesus, you have a home, a family, and real love?

That God loves us is often the first thing we are taught in church and it can be the hardest thing on earth to believe. Maybe you grew up with an "if" relationship with God. If you are good, if you avoid sin, then God will love you. But what happens now that you have done bad things, you have hurt people?

Well God knows, he really knows you, at your worst, at my worst, he was there in the inexcusable moments of our lives, and with full knowledge of our sins, Jesus has offered us a love that will never be taken away. So stop hiding from God. Stop pretending. Stop trying to make up for your bad choices by your giving and good deeds. Jesus knows you and loves you.

Maybe you have experienced too much pain in your life. Maybe it is death or sickness or loneliness, a prayer that went unanswered or the loss of a dream. And you feel as if God has removed his love from you. Well this morning, this message is for you, Jesus has not taken his love away.

The best moments in my life are when this love from God has become real to me, moments where I knew God knew the real me and loved me. When I learned again that I am not alone, that God has not abandoned me. These moments are our best moments. And I want to close our time together in prayer. I want to take a minute to remember God and the moments that His love has been real to us. I want to ask again for God to make his love real to us, especially to those who wonder if God really loves them. And I want to pray for the people we love the most. God promised David that He would love David's children and grandchildren with this great love. I want to pray for the people we love the most to accept Jesus' offer of a home, a family, and a love that will never be taken away. Please pray with me.