

God Dwells With His People

2Samuel 7:1-17

One of the most informative experiences I have ever had was building a house from the ground up.

I had graduated from Bible College in the spring of 2001 and on the advice of my mentor I had decided to get a trade.

That decision came around the time my parents had decided to put a substantial addition on the house where my grandfather was living so that they could help him stay in his house as he aged.

So right after graduation that spring I moved home and set to work building that addition with my grandfather, my dad, and a couple of good friends lending a hand from time to time.

To say that I knew very little when that project started is an understatement and I remember one day in particular when that was on display.

A few friends of my grandfather had stopped by to visit and they came to the back door where I was working.

By that time the main floor was on the foundation and I think we were about half way through framing the walls.

They introduced themselves and began chatting with me for a few minutes.

They took interest in the building project and began to ask me some questions about it.

They ask me, "Who laid the foundation?"

I said, "I did."

"What do you know about laying blocks?" I said, "Nothing."

They proceeded to ask, "Who is doing the framing?" I said, "I am."

What do you know about framing?" I said, "Nothing."

"Who is going to put on the roof?" I said, "I am."

"What do you know about shingling?" I said, "Nothing."

They asked me the same question about the plumbing, electrical, and drywall.

I supposed I should have said from the start that I didn't know anything about anything, but instead I just let them ask.

I think they kept asking because they probably thought that I must know something about something and they were curious to learn what that something was, but as it turned out nothing is all I knew.

Eventually they gave up on me and went to see my grandfather and they probably left there thinking someone had made a bad decision to put me in charge of that project.

Now I fully admit my lack of skill did show in some areas, but I am happy to report that the house is still standing and keeping my parents warm and dry 23 years later.

The only reason that is the case is because my dad had the knowledge and skill to do the project and he was patient enough to put up with my mistakes and teach me along the way.

In many ways the LORD is like that with us.

He is patient beyond measure, He endures with us when we make mistakes, and He redirects us when we get ahead of ourselves.

Have you asked yourself lately, “Where would I be if not for the patience and kindness of God?”

That is a good question to ask from time to time.

[It is a question our text this morning **2Samuel 7:1-17** brought to my mind. In this passage we find king David settled in his new capital city of Jerusalem and he gets an idea in his head to build a house for the ark of God. The ark is a box the LORD commanded Moses to make which contained the stone tablets of God’s law, a jar of manna, and staff of the first high priest. The ark was placed in a tent called the Tabernacle in a part of the Tabernacle called the holy of holies. When it was placed there God caused His glory to appear above it. Because that is the case the ark is a tangible sign of God’s presence and that is what David’s desire to build a building for it is all about. The king has a longing and a delight in the Lord dwelling among His people. That should be true of us as well. We should have that same kind of desire and delight in the LORD and so we should do our best to learn alongside King David some important lessons about the presence of God in our lives. The first lesson is that...]

Point #1 – Wanting to honour God’s presence is good. (Verses 1-3)

Psalm 84 says, “A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere” which is a way of saying that there is great delight in being near to God and it is good to demonstrate that in some way.

Verses 1-2 tell us what prompts David to think about building a more permanent structure for the ark, let’s listen together.

David’s situation had completely changed from what it was some years before this.

For a long time he lived running for his life.

War was the constant theme of his life as he had to fight battles with fellow Israelites as well and foreign enemies.

Now things had changed. He had settled in Jerusalem and it says here in verse 1 that “he lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies.”

Life is stable, prosperous, and peaceful for David and that gets him thinking.

He sees how good he has it and compares where he is living to where the ark is being kept.

He is in a palace and the ark is in a tent.

There is the sense in verse 2 that he feels like that is a problem.

Every commentary that I read on this passage looks kindly on David’s attitude here.

After all, how easy is it for us to take God’s blessings for granted?

How easy is it for us to enjoy material things and push the LORD to the back of our minds?

The opposite happens for David here. His success focuses his heart and mind on the LORD and he wants to honour God by building something more substantial for the Ark of the Covenant a symbol of God’s presence.

It says here that the king shares his idea with Nathan the prophet.

A prophet in the Old Testament is someone who heard directly from the LORD, so who better to run this idea past than him.

Nathan answers the king in **verse 3**.

When the prophet hears the idea his counsel is to go forward with great confidence.

The only logical reason to give an answer like that is that Nathan thinks it is a good idea.

It is a good thing to want to honour God and His choice to dwell among His people.

[I have always appreciated this building. I doubt we could find many church buildings being built like this today. One of the things I noticed very early on about the design of this building is the location of the pulpit. You can sit in any seat in the whole building and you can see this spot. I believe the heart behind that design is to focus the attention of the congregation on the authority of the word of God. Is it necessary to have a building like this to honour God’s Word? Nope, the first congregation of this church in 1854 met in a barn and we could do that again if necessary, but I do think it is good thing to think wisely about how to design a building to honour the LORD?]

It is a good thing to live like we want to honour God, to live like we want to live in His presence.

I think it is great if you want to put a Jesus fish on the back of your car, and it is even better to drive like you believe Jesus is right there beside you.

It is great to put a lawn sign in your yard that says “Keep Christ in Christmas” but that needs to mean more than going to Christmas Eve service and calling it done.

I think David in this passage gives us a good example of a deep heartfelt desire that he wants to connect to a tangible action.

[David’s desire to honour the LORD here is good, but as we see in the next few verses the LORD has other plans. From what He tells the prophet Nathan we learn this next and very important lesson, that...]

Point #2 – God determines how He dwells among His people. (Verses 4-7)

The LORD according to His own will and nature decides the degree to which His displays His visible glory to His creatures.

Look with me at verses 4-5.

That question at the end of verse five is a rhetorical one, which is expecting an answer of “no!”

We could take that to mean that building a house for the LORD is a silly idea.

I mean after all what kind of house could do justice to the almighty, infinite, creator of the universe.

It is true that it is impossible to build a grand enough dwelling place for God, His presence is never limited to one place.

I doubt that is what the Lord is getting at with His question here because if that were His point then His commanding Moses to build the Tabernacle would make no sense.

It is not that building a permanent structure is silly from a theological perspective, it is that David is getting ahead of himself.

That becomes clear in **verses 6-7.**

Why did God have Moses build a tent? Why has He never asked anyone from the time of Moses through the time of the judges up to David’s time to build a house?

Because tents can be easily moved from place to place.

Does God need a tent to live in? Does He need shade from the sun, protection from the rain, or insulation from the cold?

Of course not!

He has no need of a tent or a permanent house. So why have the tent?

He has the tent to have a place where He can cause His glory to be visibly present in a way that protects imperfect people from the consuming nature of His holiness.

It is a means of being tangibly present with His people.

Why a tent? Because when the people came up from Egypt they had to move from place to place and the tent is a tangible way of showing that God is going with them.

Even after they went into the Promised Land, getting settled was elusive and because there was still work to be done to establish the nation the Lord keeps a tent instead of asking for a house as a way of saying I'm with you no matter where you go.

God is saying no to David building a house, because there is still work to be done in terms of settling the people in the land.

David is a king of war and bloodshed (1Chronicles 22:8) so it is not for him to build a house as a symbol of peace and rest.

The idea is good, but it is not for David to decide how God will make His presence among His people known, that is for the LORD to determine.

[Before I knew much about how to troubleshoot an electrical circuit someone asked me to come and have a look at a switch that wasn't working. I agreed and went over with a multi-meter. I touched the meter lead to the screw of the switch and because I didn't understand the situation I didn't leave enough room between the switch screw and the box and the meter lead touched the metal of the box and ended up melting the meter lead. I was a good thing to want to help, but that good desire didn't change the laws of electricity.]

I think it is fair to say human beings get this backwards quite often when it comes to spiritual things.

We make decisions about life and worship as though we get to decide how things are going to go.

Sometimes we can even have good intentions and good plans but it is not something the LORD wants us to do.

The good news from this text is that the LORD is faithful to give His servants clear directions in these matters.

If we have a desire to honour and serve Him, if we are committed to knowing His word, to listening to other believers,

and humble enough to submit to His direction, then He lead us in the way He wants us to go.

[I can only imagine that hearing God say no to his plan to build a house for the ark would have been a little disappointing for David. Thankfully, the LORD says more to him. He reminds him of where he came from and also gives him some powerful promises. That shows us this third important lesson concerning God dwelling with His people. The lesson is that...]

Point #3 – God being with His people makes serving Him possible. (Verses 8-11)

The only reason anyone can do anything, especially things done for the LORD, is because He is actively involved in the workings of the world.

In verse 8 God tells the prophet Nathan to use an incredibly powerful phrase with David.

He says, "...say to my servant David, Thus says the LORD of hosts."

What a powerful statement.

The God Who commands the armies of heaven has something to say to you David.

Here is what He says...(Verse 8b-9)

Remember, David where you came from and how you ended up here.

God took you from watching over your father's sheep to being the ruler over all Israel.

How did that happen?

The answer is right there at the beginning of verse 9, do you see it there?

God says, "I have been with you wherever you went."

How did David defeat Goliath? God was with him.

How is it that he survived all those years when he was on the run from Saul? God was with him.

Why does he win victory after victory? Because God is with him.

Of course this is bigger than just David, God speaks in verses 10 and 11 about giving rest to all His people.

And then at the end of verse 11 the LORD promises to make David "a house."

We will see in verses 12-17 that when God promises to build David a house He is talking about something more than a house made of cedar, he is talking about family dynasty.

It seems pretty clear that the only reason David is able to accomplish anything for the LORD is that God has been, is, and will be with Him.

[There are all kinds of examples of dependency in creation. The sun in our solar system is a great example of this. All life on this planet depends on the light and energy that comes from the sun. Without it nothing else could happen.]

That is an imperfect illustration for this lesson.

Everything depends on God and so when we talk about serving Him we have to realize that is only possible because He makes it possible.

Just think for a moment about anything we can do for the LORD or anything that we can give to Him.

Why do we have the ability to do anything? Because God made us. He gave us a mind, muscles, arms, legs, hands, feet, life, breath, and everything else that gives us any ability to do anything.

Why do we have anything to give? Because God gave it to us in the first place.

It goes farther than that however, because this is more than the LORD giving us a bunch of tools and saying you go do it.

It is Him being active and present in everything we do for His glory.

If we stop and think about it we never give the LORD anything that He hasn't already given to us and we never accomplish anything for His sake without Him being right there working in and through us.

[Do we want to serve the LORD today? I hope we do. Do we realize that our service depends totally on Him being with us? Jesus says in John 15:5, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*" That is good news for us. It is good news because of what we learn in verses twelve to seventeen. If our hope in all of life depends on God being with His people then our hope is absolutely certain because...]

Point #4 – God is determined to dwell with His people forever. (Verses 12-17)

The LORD has set His eternal unwavering affection on those that belong to Him by faith and because of that unending love He will be with believers into all eternity.

David will not be building a house for the ark, his task will continue to be making God's people secure, but there will come a day when a house will be built and the LORD tells him about it in verses 12-13.

The hope of the LORD dwelling with His people is going to continue on beyond the lifetime of King David.

A son will come and he will build a house for the LORD and God will establish his throne, it says at the end of verse 13, forever.

The temporary tent will be replaced by a more permanent structure.

That happens according to the book of 1 Kings.

David's son Solomon takes the throne and builds an impressive structure to the glory of God in Jerusalem.

The LORD also looks beyond Solomon in **verses 14-16**.

God says He is going to be a father to David's heir and he will be a son to the LORD.

What an amazing statement.

It is intended, I believe, to give us a picture of an irrevocable commitment that God is making.

That is going to be true when the son messes up.

When David's future heirs fall into disobedience God is going to discipline them.

That will happen many times in the future.

It starts with Solomon. In his later years he worships false gods and the consequence comes in the form of a divided kingdom when his son Rehoboam takes the throne.

It gets worse from there and the nation goes through several cycles of judgment and restoration.

But notice God's says here that His "steadfast love will never depart from David's line of succession as it did from Saul's.

Instead He promises David that his kingdom will be made sure 'forever' and his "throne will be established forever."

If this was only talking about David's descendants that sat upon the earthly throne of Israel then God's promise here would have failed.

But if we look to God the Son who took on humanity as a descendant of David and lived in perfect obedience to God, who suffered not for His own wrongdoing but for ours, then we will see that this promise has been fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.

Everyone who sat on Israel's throne died and was buried just like David, but when Jesus was raised from the dead He sat down at the right hand of God to rule and reign for all eternity.

Jesus is also building a house for the LORD.

A building much more glorious than one made with wood, stone, and gold.

It is a building made of people. People born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, people forgiven and set free from the power of sin and death through trusting in Christ as LORD and saviour, people whom the Father calls sons and daughters for the sake of Jesus.

People who will dwell in the light of God's unveiled glory forever because He is faithful to His promises.

That is the glorious picture that we find and the end of the bible, when we see all of God's plans and promises fulfilled in Christ.

God is determined brothers and sisters to dwell with His people forever.

Do you want to be a part of that? I can think of no better desire to have in our hearts.

If we want that we have to understand we don't get to decide how that happens. God determines how He will dwell among His people and He has determined that will happen through faith in Christ alone.

If we want that we have to understand our need and depend on His presence and power to keep us as we seek to serve Him.

If we do that He will be our God and we will be His people forever.