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# God in the House

*2 Sam 7:1-17, Luke 1:26-38*

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So King David wanted to build a house for God – a big one! -- a mansion for God to live in! Now that he was king, David himself lived in a fine house, and the Ark of the Covenant was still in a tent – the same tent that housed it when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness. Now that things were settled down and the country was at peace, surely it was time for an upgrade.

Had David gone ahead with the building project, it would certainly have been a truly grand house – something that would be talked about and admired for miles around – far beyond the boundaries of the small nation of Israel. It would have been a visual reminder of how strong the God of Israel was. And it probably would have been a grand memorial to what a fine and great king David had been.

Now, this is completely understandable. It wouldn't be the first time that someone wanted to do something huge and grand for God – nor would it be the last! Who could possibly object to such a fine idea?

Well, God, it seems, for one. God objected. God opposed the plan. While there are a variety of reasons given in different parts of scripture, God doesn't really give a reason here. God simply tells Nathan that David is not to build a house for God – God is going to build a house for David. Well, not a house exactly, the way WE think of a house, but something much more significant. God is going to give David a great household, a strong family, a dynasty, a future.

*“Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” (v. 16)*

This story was a huge part of Israel's growing understanding that their God was fundamentally different from the other gods that people of that time, in that area, put their trust in. Other gods demanded all sorts of things. Other gods of the time required offerings of meat or grain or even people to ensure that they wouldn't get angry – to ensure that rains would come and crops would grow and babies would live. This God – this God of Israel seemed to be more interested in giving stuff to the people, even when they made God angry. Our God, apparently, didn't want David to do things like that – at least not the conventional things one might assume. God wanted -- God promised to do things for David – things far greater than David would even have dared to ask for.

Now that doesn't seem quite fair – to God, I mean! Seems like God is doing all the work, doesn't it? But Isaiah would remind us – and I love this, I have it on a T-shirt -- that “God's thoughts are not our thoughts and God's ways are not our ways.” What really matters is not what we might want to do for God, but what God wants to do for us. And getting our heads around that is still a struggle for us.

That's why a stories like the prodigal son are so important. God hikes up his robes and runs out to meet the lost with open arms! God reaches out to welcome us not as a reward for stuff we do for God, but as the beginning of an intimate relationship with us.

Did God keep that promise to David? Well, Solomon did succeed David and become king, but when Solomon died, the ten northern tribes refused to submit to his son, Rehoboam, and revolted. From that point on, there would be two kingdoms of Hebrews: Israel in the north, and in the south - Judah. Israel in the north would come to a tragic end when it was defeated by Assyria in 722 BCE and all its people deported. About a hundred years or so later, Judah would fall to the Babylonians.

And King David's 'house and kingdom' that was supposed to be established? His “Forever throne”? – well, it seems it didn't last very long at all.

Or did it?

When we think that way, we're doing the same thing that David did. Remember, “God's thoughts are not our thoughts and God's ways are not our ways.” When we think of a kingdom, we tend to think of a country – a nation, a fixed territory with a king and a palace and a capital city and maybe an army.

But God wasn't thinking of anything so small as that – no! The promise to David turns out to be something far more significant. You see this, and other promises made by God to David will be fulfilled ultimately by Jesus; from the house of David. Because the author of Matthew was writing primarily to the Jewish community, you'll notice that Matthew's Gospel in particular makes a clear point of making this connection, repeatedly referring to Jesus as the Son of David.

When Jesus spoke about his kingdom he wasn't talking about something that requires some human sitting on a throne, in a place of power. He wasn't talking about

any geographical territory, defended with weapons or promoted by an army. And he wasn't talking about a church as we know it today, where people gather once a week to hear a long-winded sermon, sing or have snacks. This is a new kind of kingdom. God is fulfilling God's promise in ways that were not recognized by many at the time – nor are they now! "For ... God's ways are not our ways."

The story of Christ's coming to earth emphasizes that point. Where would you begin to build a kingdom that might last forever? This beautiful and unexpected story takes us to a simple girl from the provinces of Judea; unsophisticated, uneducated, a girl not even old enough to have a family of her own; and the announcement is made that it is she who will be the one to have a child who will start the story all over again, in a whole new way. It is to her the angel appears and speaks those words: "...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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 ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Now, I don't think that's how I would do it. And it wasn't what anyone had been expecting or hoping for. But the kingdom that would come from David would be so much bigger, so much grander and so much more wonderful than anything David could have ever even imagined. And it all came about through people only God could have chosen, because that's how the story goes – "God's thoughts are not our thoughts; God's ways are not our ways," and nothing is impossible for God.

God chose Mary to be such a crucial part of this story, it seems, for no real reason at all – at least no reason that we could imagine. She didn't really earn her place in the story – although she certainly proved herself to be up to the task! – But her response is a model for all of us: "Here I am," she says, "a servant of the lord; let it be with me according to your word."

And one of the coolest things about the story is that with Mary, and with the birth of her son Jesus, the story of God's kingdom isn't coming to a close, but rather it's starting up all over again!

Even today the story continues. And it's exciting -- because if you think about it, we're not just reading the story; we're part of it. We're living it. We're up in it singing back-up for Jesus!

Even today, people who have done nothing to deserve any special treatment from God, are finding that God doesn't want us to do anything special to earn God's love, but that God wants to do stuff for us – to love us and to forgive us and to bless us and to grant us the most wonderful promises.

Even today, people who have done nothing to deserve any special treatment find themselves called. Called to be a part of this story – the story of this kingdom, which is at hand, and has been ever since John the Baptist said so out in the desert – this kingdom which lives and grows, without boundaries, without armies, without kings or presidents; but with the unlikely tools of mercy and compassion and humility and service.

Even today, unlikely people like me and like you, find ourselves invited to be part of something which many people may never understand – heck, I may never understand it! – but it's a movement of God that will last forever. Jesus came to save the least and the lost and anyone who would seek him out; and we don't have to do anything. All we have to do is say 'yes' and we'll get caught up in the story of what God is doing in this world, the story that started anew with the birth of Jesus.

And we'll begin to respond to the call; demonstrating to God and to everyone that whatever God wants to do is us and through us, we are ready. ““Here I am, a servant of the lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

The Christmas story is the story of how God works among us – building something new and wonderful. It's the story of something that will last forever. It's the story that we are invited to be a part of as we learn more and more about Jesus the Christ, and follow his ways. And even though we may not deserve it, we can do that, for nothing is impossible with God.

Amen.