

The Most Important Words in the World

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[0 : 00] After the king was settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.

Nathan replied to the king, Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you. But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, this is what the Lord says, Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?

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.

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?

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.

[1 : 27] I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth.

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 shall not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning, and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel.

I will also give you rest from all your enemies. The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you.

When your days are over, and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom.

He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands.

[2 : 44] But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me.

Your throne shall be established forever. Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you, Ruth, very much for reading. If you could keep your Bibles open at 2 Samuel chapter 7, that would be a great help to me.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if that would help you just to follow where we're going as we look at this together. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for gathering us.

We thank you for your word to us, the sword of your spirit. We pray you would speak to us now by your spirit, and by that same spirit that you would open our eyes, that you would align our hearts with your word, that we would respond rightly, for your glory and for our good.

[3 : 56] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I've got a picture of the happy couple from the royal wedding. There they are.

She's moved up in the world. What is she now? What's her Scottish title? She's... Everyone said it at once. Is it that she's the Countess of Dumbarton?

Isn't that extraordinary? Countess of Dumbarton. From Hollywood star to... Amazing. But, of course, the big question everyone was asking after the wedding wasn't, what did you think of the dress?

It was, what did you think of the sermon? It was quite extraordinary, the reaction of Michael Curry. Ed Miliband, the reaction to his sermon, Ed Miliband, the politician, said, Michael Curry could almost make me a believer.

Whereas Trevor Beeson, who was once Dean of Winchester, wrote into the papers to say, the sermon was, I believe, seriously misjudged and distorted what was otherwise a delightful occasion. [4 : 59] And he seemed especially offended that the sermon was longer than five minutes. Rod Liddell wrote this. His address was the usual mindless pap about love being the only thing that matters. There we are.

So, whatever you thought of the sermon, it started and ended with this drawing from, of course, a much more famous speech, because he quoted from Martin Luther King at the start and the end of the sermon.

And it reminded us of that great speech, Martin Luther King, I Have a Dream, which undoubtedly was one of the greatest speeches of modern human history and really helped shape the world as we see it today, as the civil rights movement used that as a defining moment.

And it ranks up there with Churchill's, We Shall Fight Them on the Beechers speech, or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, or William Wilberforce appealing to Parliament to stop the slave trade. These great speeches that really have shaped the world as it is today.

And speeches can have that power. But in 2 Samuel 7, we come to a speech that's had far more impact than any of those speeches. It was a speech made by God himself to his messenger, the prophet Nathan, in a vision.

[6 : 09] And I'm absolutely convinced that if we as a church at St Silas could really take on board more deeply the implications of this speech that God made, it would completely reshape our whole outlook on life.

If only we could view our problems and reshape our dreams in light of what God said to Nathan that night. Sometimes we talk about being a Christian as believing in God, don't we?

We say, well, I believe in God, I'm a Christian. But being a Christian is so much more than that. Being a Christian is more even than just knowing what God is like. Being a Christian is about trusting that the living God will do what he has promised.

Fundamentally, that's what a Christian believes, that God will do what he's promised. And in 2 Samuel 7, God lays out for us his plans for our world and for the future in a way that until that time he had never done before.

And he's still absolutely committed to these plans today. So firstly, we're going to see the word that Yahweh insists on in verses 1 to 5. Now, Yahweh is God's name for himself.

[7 : 14] It's I am who I am or I will be who I will be. It's the word that we have translated the Lord whenever we see the Lord in capitals, Yahweh. And we pick up the story again with King David in verse 1.

You can imagine David. David is sitting out on the veranda of his palace, gin and tonic in hand. And he's got his favorite dinner guest with him, his old chum Nathan, the prophet.

And David has a very satisfied look about him, as any of us will know who have been with us in this series in 2 Samuel, as David reflects on where God has brought him to. Let's just think about where we've got to.

Take a step right back. We've got a world that is broken. It is marred by sin and death and decay and sadness. But God made a promise to one man, to Abraham, long before David's time, that through Abraham, God would establish a kingdom through his descendants.

And that through that kingdom, God will bring his blessing to the whole world that is currently marred by his curse. And as God begins to act on that promise, he takes Abraham's descendants, he makes them into a great nation.

[8 : 22] And we get centuries later to this point in history with King David. And Abraham's descendants, along with anyone who trusts God's promises, are living in this land together, the land of Canaan that God's given them.

In chapter 5, they finally made David the king over them, which was a momentous moment. Then last week in chapter 6, David brought God's presence in among the people.

He brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, to the royal city of David. So the good times are rolling. This is the golden age for the Old Testament people of God.

And we're on the veranda with David and Nathan, and they've got their drinks. And they're looking at the sun setting over the promised land. And David leans back, and he thinks to himself, there are no enemies in sight anymore.

The Philistines don't camp anywhere near us anymore. And he lives in this magnificent palace that's being built. But something starts to niggle at him. What next for this great leader?

[9 : 21] Verse 1. After the king was settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the Ark of God remains in a tent.

It just seems the wrong way around, doesn't it? He's living in a house made of the finest wood that money can buy, imported. And God, represented by the Ark, is still sleeping under canvas.

And so David thinks, I should build a temple for God. A permanent home that's fitting for God. It seems entirely reasonable of David. So Nathan replies to the king in verse 3, whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it.

For the Lord is with you. And with that, they hear the bell that signals dinner's ready, and they go off, and they've sorted it. They've got a plan, and they go off for a lavish dinner. All well and good. But no.

If you look at verse 4. But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, go and tell my servant David, this is what the Lord says, are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?

[10 : 27] God brings the authority of his word clearly into the decision. So this is revelation over reason, if you like. Once God speaks, that's the end of it.

No matter how reasonable David's plan was and seemed at the time, now God has spoken. And the most important thing that the king of God's people can ever do is obey the word of God.

And we face the same challenge today as God's people. God has given us minds to reason with. As believers, he gives us the Holy Spirit living in us to help us reason through the will of God.

But ultimately, God still sets the agenda for our lives, not through our reason, but through his word, through his revelation. We go to the scriptures to learn about his will for our lives.

And sometimes those things align, don't they? And we can see what God requires of us in living lives of love for him and love for others and making disciples. And we can reason. And we think, well, that makes sense to me, that I should live like that.

[11 : 27] And then that's easier. But perhaps the hardest times in our lives to really submit to God's revealed will are when it goes differently to our reason.

And we think, I can't understand why God commands me to do that. But his command is clear. And he sets the agenda. So I'll follow him. When we were studying this passage in our staff meeting last week, a member of the staff team said, verse 3 is actually really dangerous, isn't it?

Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you. And how often would we be tempted to think like that as Christians? Well, this is my idea, and God's with me, so I'll just go ahead and do it, rather than seeking God's will and remembering it's God who sets the agenda.

So that's our first point, the word that Yahweh insists on. He sets the agenda. Now he explains that agenda to David. Our second point, the grace that Yahweh is committed to.

So the history lesson starts in verses 6 and 7. 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.

[12 : 39] 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?

So the first thing we're seeing about God's grace is it's an identifying grace. The reason he hasn't got a temple is because he is so committed to his people.

They've been wandering for generations, so in all that time, the Lord has wandered as well. I don't know what you think about that, but I think that is an extraordinary thing to learn about God.

There is no other God like this who sees his people in distress and he comes to dwell among them so that he can save them. The story is told of an American statesman, politician, Sam Rabin.

He was the speaker of the house and one of the press reporters who used to go every week for the press conferences had a teenage daughter who died in a tragic accident.

[13 : 41] The next morning, the reporter was at home and he heard a knock on the door of his flat and he opened it and there was Sam Rabin. And Sam asked if there was anything he could do to help. And taken about, the reporter said, thanks for coming, but I don't really think there is anything that you can do.

We've got things in hand. We're just trying to recover from the shock of what's happened. So Sam said, well, have you all had coffee this morning? And he admitted they hadn't had coffee. So he

came in and he went into the kitchen and he made them all coffee for the family as they were coping with this tragedy.

And while he was serving it, the reporter remembered that Sam had his weekly meeting with the president at exactly that time every week. And so he said to him, aren't you meant to be at the White House?

And Sam Rabin said, well, I was, but I called the president and I told him that I had a friend who was in trouble and I couldn't make it today. It's an astonishing story, isn't it, of a senior statesman condescending to think, this person who serves me is in trouble and I'll drop everything to help them.

Well, friends, that's just a glimpse of the character of the living God, that he sees his people in distress, a distress caused by their own sin and he condescends to come and dwell with them so that he can save them.

[14:59] That's what he's done for David's people and if we can grasp that character of God in the Old Testament, maybe it prepares us just a little bit for the arrival of Jesus Christ.

Being in very nature God, he didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, took the very nature of a servant and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

That's God's identifying grace. Next, the Lord recounts to David what he's done for David already. It's experienced grace in verses 8 and 9 and he brings out three things for David.

First, that he chose him. Verse 8, 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.

Then, his presence with David. Verse 9, I have been with you wherever you have gone. And thirdly, his power. I have cut off all your enemies from before you.

[16:04] Do you see what an extraordinary response this is to David's idea? I'm going to do something for God. God says, let me just go through with you again all the things that I have done for you.

And these experiences of Yahweh's grace, of course, they're totally unique to David in one sense. He is a unique king of God's people at a unique time. But, in a similar way, any of us who are here today who is trusting Jesus Christ as our saviour and king, we could tell a similar story of God's grace to us.

that before we had done anything for God, God saw us in the dominion of darkness and he chose you and he grabbed you and he brought you from there and he gave you a passport that says, citizen of heaven forever.

And God has been with you wherever you have gone. He has never left you. And if you're still a Christian today, it is because God is powerfully at work and has been ever since you became a Christian to keep the devil away from you and preserve you.

He's delivered you from evil. God's grace to David has been astonishing. That lowly shepherd boy with all the big brothers out tending the sheep and God chooses him and says, this man will become the shepherd king of my people.

[17:26] Living in a palace secure from all his enemies. But after hearing of the identifying grace of God and the experienced grace of God, God then moves on to the future and we hear about trustworthy grace that's coming.

So look with me from the end of verse 9. The Lord says, end of verse 9, the Lord says to David through Nathan, now I will make your name great like the names of the greatest men on earth 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 shall not oppress them anymore as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders of my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

And for David here, once Nathan relays it and for any of us reading it, if you've read your Bible through, you've heard it before. It's a cover version. What God's doing here is he is refashioning to David the promises that he made to Abraham generations before.

He said to Abraham, I will make your name great and so here to David, your name will be like the names of the greatest men on earth. The promise that God surely kept, didn't he, with David.

[18:44] Still known today as one of the greatest men of human history. The Lord promised to Abraham that he would turn him into a great nation and give them a land and here that promise is

repeated to David.

They'll enjoy security, freedom, and they won't fear their enemies anymore. It's a confusing promise, isn't it? Because in verse 1 it said, the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him.

But God's promising to lavish grace upon grace. God is only just getting started with this rest promise. There's a permanence, isn't there, to the idea of being planted in verse 10.

This idea of you will be secure, nothing will move you. And the truth is that this promise is never fully fulfilled in Israel's history. They always know, even when the going gets this good and in Solomon's time it gets better, they always know all it will take is for them to turn away from the living God into their own sin or for their king to do that and things will go badly for them.

And what about the great enemies of sickness and death? There's never rest from those enemies. And that's because when God makes this promise to David, it's ultimately not about the people then and Canaan.

[19 : 56] It's about the future for our whole world as it was for Abraham. That God promises to David here and to us through this promise that he plans to bring for our world nothing less than a new heaven and earth.

And for any of us who trust his promises that he will plant us there so that nothing can ever move us from there. We will find permanent security forever.

Our prayers for summits between North Korea and America will be a thing of the past. There'll be no more sadness and no more sickness. There'll be no more human trafficking. There'll be no more shipwrecks of people migrating across the Mediterranean.

You'll never turn on the news again and find something harrowing or depressing. God is absolutely committed to this. He's committed himself right here as he promises. His rest, his shalom, his peace for his people.

And the whole history of the world is shaped by God's promise here, his commitment to David.

We're used to promises being made lightly, aren't we? And then being disappointed.

[21 : 02] One of the most foolish things you can do is trust the promises of a sports team and wrap your emotions around them. I'm a Middlesbrough football club fan and at the end of last season as we got relegated from the English premiership, our chairman said next season we're going to smash the league.

Okay, and I built my emotions on that promise and we came sixth and it was just really deflating.

Okay, we're used to promises being made lightly. Of course, much more painfully and seriously we see marriage promises being made lightly.

We see politicians make manifesto promises and then never mention them again and it really angers people as we see promises not kept. But here is the living God who keeps his promises reiterating them after centuries of sin from Abraham to David.

He is unshakable. He is constant. He is resolute and we can build our lives on these promises. I don't know if you remember the Lord of the Rings movies but in the second movie the kind of the good guys are massively under the cosh and there's this massive army of orcs threatening to consume Tolkien's world, Middle Earth.

and there's a group of surviving humans and elves and dwarves who've clubbed together and they retreat to this place called Helm's Deep, this fortress and they know basically it's only a matter of time before the walls are breached and they're finished and this multitude of orcs descends on Helm's Deep but Gandalf, the wizard, leaves and he says to Aragorn, the king, he says, look to my coming at first light on the fifth day at dawn.

[22 : 41] look to the east and he goes and they're left and besieged and the fourth night, if you like, the night before the fifth day, the walls are breached and Aragorn is there with the leaders of this fellowship and he says to them in despair, what can men do against such reckless hate and they feel the game is up and then dawn breaks and they see the light through the window and they go out and they look to the east and Gandalf is there and he's kept his promise and he arrives with this great army that he's brought together and they come down, the light blinds the orcs and the victory is theirs that day and they sweep away everything that they were fearing in a great victory.

Promises that you can rely on and pin your hopes on and we need to think like that about God's promises here in the darkness that we face in our world. He is resolute, he will keep them.

So how is he going to carry them out? Well that's our third point. We've heard of the grace that Yahweh is committed to. Thirdly, the king that Yahweh will establish. Remember how we started? David wants to build a house for Yahweh. Yahweh says, I don't need you to build a house for me. Then he says, I'll build a house for you. A different kind of a house.

Have a look with me at verse 11. The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you. In other words, a dynasty. A dynasty for David.

[24 : 12] When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you. Your own flesh and blood. And I will establish his kingdom.

He is the one who will build a house for my name. Now on the face of it there, God could still be talking about a stone building for himself. And there is this initial fulfillment in the next generation as Solomon builds the temple for God to dwell in in Jerusalem.

But we hear no more about that in the rest of 2 Samuel. And very obviously, this is a prophecy that starts to burst its banks. You know like a river when you get a deluge of water and the river no longer matters anymore because the banks just get burst.

And this is a prophecy that goes way beyond anything that Solomon could fulfill. The Lord is pointing David forward to a greater one coming in David's line.

So we get the next line, verse 13. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Nothing can ever stop God from keeping these promises.

[25 : 17] Not David's death and his promises will last forever. Not even sin will stop him. Verse 14. I will be his father of this king and he shall be my son.

When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love for him, my love will never be taken away from him as I took it away from Saul whom I removed from before you.

That is that from this time on in the history of the world and in Bible history, we will see God preserving that line of kings. Even when the people are taken into exile for their sin, God preserves that line.

There's always that man, the heir to David's throne, preserved by God. And in case Nathan and David missed it, notice the words forever. Come twice in verse 16. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me.

Your throne shall be established forever. Do you see what the world is being told here in 1000 BC in 2 Samuel 7?

[26 : 24] God is going to put the world right. He's committed to that. Look for one coming in David's line through whom God will keep his promise. And then centuries go by and we should feel the relief and the joy of Matthew, the converted tax collector in the first century as he puts pen to scroll to write his gospel and he says, here's a record of the family line of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

He's saying, this is the one, the Lord of promise we've been waiting for for a thousand years. And the apostle Paul, virtually on his deathbed as he writes to Timothy, it's the last thing we know that he wrote.

He knows he's going to die, the apostle Paul. He says, remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. The one who's come in David's line.

Paul says, this is my gospel, Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. For he was the one who could heal the sick, who could calm a storm.

Matthew knows, around him, we had nothing to fear. Here was the king who when he was flogged, it wasn't for his sin, it was for our sin as he bore a sin-bearing death for us to save us.

[27 : 41] And by raising Jesus from the dead, Yahweh has kept his promise that this king will reign forever so that Jesus now does reign at the place we call God's right hand, the highest place.

And God has said to him, sit there while I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. And all we're waiting for today is for the curtain to be drawn back and the reality to be revealed as Jesus comes in glory and establishes his reign forever.

He is the one who is building the true temple that God promises here. Not a stone building for God. When God's, he doesn't call it the temple, he says, a house for my name.

And Jesus builds that house as he gathers us to himself, a temple of living stones, people that God dwells in, so that if you put your trust in his promises today, God's spirit will come into your life and you will become part of the spiritual house that God is building for his name and his renown.

So how do we respond to this great speech? Well, we're going to look at David's model response next week. But today, just enjoy it. Let's just rest in the truths that God gives us today and enjoy the God who makes promises like this.

[29 : 00] Throughout the mess of human history, he is steadfast in his promises to Abraham, to David, fulfilled in Jesus, to be fulfilled again as he comes again.

Enjoy our God who asks David just to ponder his experience of grace in his life, just as we ourselves can see it in our lives. Enjoy our God who chooses to identify with his people because they're in distress in their sin so that he can save them.

And enjoy our God who has an unshakable plan to save the world through the reign of his righteous, majestic, Davidic king. So many of our problems look quite different when we know God better.

Let's pray together. Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and he said, Who am I, Sovereign Lord?

And how great you are, Sovereign Lord. Almighty God, like David, we sit before you safe in Christ, trusting in your promises and we say how great you are.

[30 : 19] Thank you that no matter how mysterious your ways seem to us today, we can trust that the world is being moved forward by your agenda. We praise you for your grace pouring out over your people, bringing us safe to this day, leading us on to the new creation where we will rest with you forever and we praise you that you have kept these promises and given us today a majestic king.

We hail his power and we wait for his coming in glory. Come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen. We're going to respond to God's word by singing together but we'll also have prayer ministry so if you'd like prayer for yourself or for someone you know do join the teams over to my right at the front or at the back they'll be delighted to hear you and pray with you.

Let's have moments of quiet and then the band will lead us in response. Amen. Amen. Amen.