

2 Samuel 7:1-17, God builds what lasts

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[0 : 00] And the rest of you, you can grab your Bibles and turn to 2 Samuel chapter 7 or keep it open in front of you. And Clifford is going to come and read for us. Let's read and hear God's word as is found in 2 Samuel chapter 7, reading from verses 1 to 17.

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 am I living in the house of Cedar while the ark of God remains in the 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 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 one of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people, Israel, why have you not built me a house of cedar?

[1 : 19] 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.

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 of men on earth.

And I will provide a place for my people Israel, and will plant them so that they can have a home for their own, and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, 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 would establish a house for you. When your days are over and your 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 will be my son.

[2 : 52] When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. 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 will endure forever before me. Your throne will be established forever. Nathan reported to David all the words of the entire revelation.

Amen. Amen. Thank you, Clifford. Well, do keep that passage open in front of you, and we're going to try and work our way through it together.

I think if you want to know what 2 Samuel chapter 7 is about, then what you really need to look for is the word house. It comes eight times in our passage.

So in verse 1, you find that David is living in his house, translated palace by the NIV. A house that we're told in verse 2 that is made of cedar, which is very fancy building material.

[4 : 05] And while David lives in his cedar palace, the ark of God dwells in it. And this is the shock, because the word is not house. The word is tent, tent. David doesn't think that's right, so he plans to build a permanent house for God in verse 5.

But God replies to him through Nathan the prophet and says that God has never lived in a house in verse 6. He's never asked anyone to build him a house of cedar in verse 7.

And then in an amazing reversal, God says to David, that David who has said, I'm going to build you a house, God says to him, no, I will build you a house. A house not made of cedar, but a house built in offspring.

Your offspring who, verse 13, will, as it happens, build my house, a temple. But still that house, that temple, will be nothing compared to the house that God builds, which verse 16 will last forever. You get it? House, house, house, house, house, house. That is a brief summary of 2 Samuel chapter 7. Now there's loads of detail in here, and I think in some ways, 2 Samuel chapter 7 is one of the most important chapters in the story of David, as he gets this covenant promise about his ancestors to come.

[5 : 22] But I want instead just to try and give us essentially a sort of an overview of what's going on here. David says, from his house, I will build the Lord a house.

God says, from his tent, I will build David an eternal house. Now let's get on with the first thing that I want you to notice, though, from this passage. It's this, God is free to do what he wants.

God is free to do what he wants. Now, I know that's a really obvious thing for me to say to you. Of course, you understand, don't you, that God is free. What I mean by that is not that God doesn't cost you anything, not saying that, rather that God is free to act.

God is the one who is free to do whatever he wills to do. Yeah, you understand that? In other words, history, the events of our time, the space in which we live, is literally his story.

Not our story, not your story, not my story, not even David's story. History is his story. See this with me in the passage. God's first response to David's house building plan in verses six to seven is to remind David that he has been moving about in a tent ever since he was brought up by the people from Egypt.

[6 : 32] But notice all the eyes in the passage. God says, I brought up the Israelites out of Egypt. I have been moving from place to place in a tent. He goes on, I never said anything about a house building to any of the rulers or judges.

I commanded to rule Israel. In other words, David, listen, what you need to understand, David, is that I am in a tent because I have chosen to be in a tent.

Because the story of the story of God's people is my story, says God. It's the story of what I have done as I have acted. So much so that when I need a house, you can be sure that it will happen because I will make it happen.

You see, David needs to understand that God is free. God is free to do what he wants. And David acts in response to the commands of God, not the other way around.

David doesn't get to tell God what to do. God gets to tell David what he is doing. It gets underlined with some more eyes. Notice from verse eight, all the eyes there.

[7 : 41] I took you, he says, getting more personal, from the pasture to make you ruler over my people, verse eight. I have been with you wherever you've gone, verse nine, cutting off the enemies and winning victories.

David, don't think that your personal story, not just the story of Israel, don't think that your personal story is the story of you, you, you. It's the story of God, God, God.

God is free to act. He can do whatever he wants to do. The history is the story of what he does, which means significantly for David that he shouldn't think that he is capable of building a house for God, as if he could contain God or as if God needs him to put a roof over his head.

David mustn't limit God like that. Now, let me just ask you just to think about that with me for a moment. It's a big idea. It's obvious and it's plain, but it is really significant.

It should be plain to us that the real God does not do everything that we would do. God is surprising to us. He doesn't do everything that we would do and he doesn't do everything that we would want him to or expect him to because fundamentally God, the God of the universe, the God who made us, the triune God of Father, Son and Spirit is not subject to my plans, my rules, my expectations or yours.

[8 : 55] He is free to do what he wants to do. He's not threatened by our decisions or limited by our ideas. God is free above all overall, doing all things in accordance with the purpose of his will.

And you and I really quickly forget that, don't we? We quickly question God's goodness or his wisdom when he doesn't do what we would do. Oh, wait a minute. Why have you done that? I wouldn't have done that.

Are you still good, God? You know, David thinks that God should be not in a tent, but in a house and God doesn't agree. So he stays in the tent. Now, you and I might not be trying to build God a house, but we might try and contain him in other ways.

Now, God, why haven't you not made it easier to be a Christian? You should make it easier to be a Christian, shouldn't you? Why have you permitted us to face the suffering that we face? Why don't you stop the godless side of Western culture away from Bible morality and values?

Oh, God, why don't you let us get the freehold to our building more easily? Why don't you enlarge the size of our church? Why don't you give us better health, better looks, better mental health? But the truth is, the bottom line, before we even get to ask the why question, which is a fair question to ask, before we ask the why question, we must admit that God is free to do what he wants to do, free to do what he decides to do in the world, because that's what it means for God to be God.

[10:12] Now, that doesn't mean, does it, that tomorrow God to choose to be bad? That's not what we're saying. The Bible is really clear that God's freedom is in line with his nature, and his nature is goodness itself.

Goodness is defined by the nature of God. So God is free to act in line with his nature at all times. God is the definition of good. But what it does mean is that the story of our lives, the story of history, is the freedom of God deciding what to do.

Now, I think if we understand that, it should help us see that God is a lot bigger than we're inclined to think, right? At 2 Samuel 7, David is realizing that he is smaller and God is greater.

That's what he's realizing. His plan to build a house comes to nothing because God is bigger and more free than David thought. And God's plan to build a house for David is what's going to happen, not the other way around.

It's interesting. I think, obviously, David taught this lesson to Solomon. Solomon is David's son. Solomon is the guy who actually builds the temple. And when he builds the temple, he prays a prayer of dedication.

[11:14] And he's clearly learned this lesson from his father, David. So listen to what he prays when the temple is dedicated. He says this, But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you.

How much less this temple that I have built, this house that I have built. God is free. And we cannot contain him to live in a building or dictate plans to him or tell him what to do. God is not limited by our thoughts of him.

Not bound to do what we should think he should do. Now, given that, given the freedom of God, what comes next? And really the big idea in the passage is surprising. Okay?

God is free to do what he wants to do. The story of history is the story of his actions. And yet, the free God does what? He binds himself to a promise. He binds himself to a promise.

The whole chapter really reads like an ancient legal document. Ancient legal documents had a particular structure and order. They start with a sort of a preamble which introduces the parties making the agreement.

[12:17] And that's God. We're told who God is and what he's done in the past. Next come the commitments that the party makes with references to blessings and curses associated with it.

And that's exactly what's going on here. You've got the preamble. You've got the past action. You've got the present commitments. And then you've got the blessings and the curses. You know, if you were to receive it through the post, it would look like, you know, like a legal document.

Like something containing a promise. Something binding. A covenant. And here in 2 Samuel chapter 7, that's exactly what it is. It's the free God.

The God who can do whatever he wants to do whenever he chooses to do it. That God is binding himself to a covenant, a promise, a commitment to David.

And look at the detail of it with me. Notice how gone are the sort of I have's. You know, I did this, I did that. And now what you get in verse 9 is the I will's.

[13:13] So God is not just describing what he's done in the past. He's now saying what he's promising to do in the future. I will, verse 9, make your name great. I will, verse 10, provide a place. I will, verse 11, give you rest from your enemies.

I will, verse 12, raise up your offspring and I will establish his kingdom. I will, verse 13, establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will, verse 14, be to him a father, disciplining him but loving him steadfastly.

This must be mind-blowing for David and we'll see in the second half and we'll look at this next week, how he responds but just notice what God is doing. Despite his freedom, tying himself to work through the line of David to build a kingdom, a kingdom that will be planted in a particular

place, a kingdom that will have rest from its enemies, a kingdom that will last forever and ever and ever.

In other words, David, you think, don't you, you know, David, you look at the tent in which the ark is and you think God is dwelling in a very temporary arrangement here and you look at your house and think, I've built myself a cedar house that's going to last a very long time and God says, no, let me show you something that will really last forever.

It's the house that I will build. It's the promise that I will make, a forever kingdom of blessing and peace with a king from your own family line, a king who I promise to love and never let go.

[14:32] Now, of course, we know and we looked at this earlier, didn't we, that this promise is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who will be king on David's throne. As you read through the promise, you can see how some of it is kept by Solomon, don't you?

You can see that but really, it's pointing beyond Solomon to someone greater than Solomon even, someone who will be born in David's town, someone who will be born in David's line, given the throne of his father David.

Christ will have the great name, won't he, at which every knee will bow. Christ will bring us final rest from our enemies. He is the one who is appointed king of an eternal kingdom, a kingdom not of this world but a kingdom of heaven.

Christ is the king who is disciplined not for his iniquity but for our iniquity as he is punished not for his sins with rods and stripes but bearing in his body the penalty for our sin and our wrongdoing, building a house of God, not of cedar or bricks or mortar but a house of people placed like living stones with him the cornerstone, a dwelling place of God for all eternity.

So here again in 2 Samuel chapter 7, God binds himself to a promise that will only be fulfilled when Christ comes. You know, all the mini-fulfillments before then in the life of David and his sons are just signposts to this greater fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

[15:52] I don't know whether you've thought about this before but you know this promise that runs all the way through the Bible that we're getting expanded on in 2 Samuel chapter 7. You realise, don't you, it starts back in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 when God promises to send someone who will crush the head of Satan, the serpent.

You know what he's doing then, don't you? He is binding himself by a promise to send his own son to the cross. You know that, don't you? God is binding himself to a promise to send his own son to the cross and that's what's going on here, isn't it?

He is saying, listen, I will do this. You can be sure. So God, the free God who can do whatever he pleases, not subject to us in any way, voluntarily through no compulsion on him, not because David deserved it, not because he owed it to humanity in any way, yet quite the opposite.

He still, he binds himself to a promise to save through the blood of his own son. Let me just try and illustrate the kind of, the wonder of what's going on here, just so that we can grasp this, if you can, with me for a moment.

I want you to imagine that this afternoon you go to Battersea Dogs' home to pick up a new dog.

Okay? You go to the dog shelter to pick up a new dog. Not a bad idea, is it, Alvina? A dog is a great thing, right? So you go there, you look at all the different kinds of dogs and what you do is you find a particularly nasty dog.

[17:18] It's jumping at the cage door. As you go in, it's barking and snapping and generally being a nuisance. Crazy though, as you're walking down this line of beautiful looking dogs and you get to this crazy snapping dog, you stop at the cage and you look at it.

You even reach your hand in to give the dog some attention, show it a bit of affection. The affection is not appreciated by the dog who bites the hand that you put in the cage.

But undeterred, you say, is it okay if I climb in there with him? Oh, well, if you really want to, yeah, go for it. So you climb in and the dog bites you again and wheezes on your leg and puts a hole in your trousers.

Still though, you're not put off and you say to the person who owns the shelter, I'm going to take that dog home. That dog is going to be my dog. And the person who runs the shelter looks at you and says, wait a minute, do you know what you're doing?

Do you know if you take that dog away from here, you know you're not bringing them back, don't you? You're taking that dog away and that dog will belong to you. It will ruin your life.

[18:27] It will destroy your property. It will ruin everything that you've hoped to do. Are you sure you want to do it? Have you ever seen a vet bill before?

Once you've taken that dog, our policy is you cannot return it. Oh, no, I know, you say, but I love that dog. I have chosen to love that dog and I will have him and I promise to take it home.

Bring me the paperwork. I'm going to sign on the line. Now, of course, it's a stupid story, isn't it? Because you would never do it, right? You would never go to the dog's home and choose a nasty dog that bites you, ruins your house and costs you all that you have and bind yourself to take it home and live with it for the rest of your life, would you?

You wouldn't do that, would you? That would be crazy. That, though, is exactly what's going on in 2 Samuel chapter 7. God is doing that and you and I are the snappy dog, right?

God is promising, isn't he? Binding himself to a promise to bring us home, though it costs him everything, the life of his son.

[19 : 36] I will have that people. They will be mine. That kingdom will belong to me. I want to labour this point a little bit this morning because it's right at the heart of the passage.

If you're not a Christian this morning, it's brilliant that you're here. Thanks for coming. This is a really great explanation for you of what it means to be a Christian. The Bible tells us this, that the truth of the universe is not that people are searching for God.

I know that's what we think, right? I know that's how we talk, you know, as if people are on a journey looking for God and, you know, maybe he's hiding underneath that rock or that rock over there.

That's what people think, isn't it? But that's not what the Bible says is happening.

Nor is the story of the universe about people working really hard so that God owes them something. You know, as if we could do certain kind of moral actions and God then has to act in a certain way towards us.

That's what religion tells you, right? You know, do this, pray like this, fast like this and God will have to bless you because you will bind God. That's nonsense.

[20 : 37] The message of the Bible is that God is free. He has to be. To be God, he has to be free. But the heart of the Christian gospel, the truth at the center of the universe is that in an inexplicable love, he has bound himself through a free choice of his own to love you, me, and save us that we might belong to him.

That plan isn't entered into lightly. It's not invented by the New Testament writers. It wasn't hatched just as the build-up to the cross of Jesus Christ. It's right here from the beginning of the Bible. It's here in 2 Samuel chapter 7 as God commits himself to David to put someone on his throne forever and ever and ever.

Now that leads us to the one application for David and for us this morning. If God is free, he binds himself to a promise. The one application is this, trust. Trust in the promise.

Trust in the promise. Now imagine if the story went something like this. David says to Nathan, you know, I'm going to build a permanent house for God. Nathan says, no, don't do that.

God's not interested in you building a house for him. He will build a house for you. David says, oh, come on, Nathan, forget that. I've got some brilliant plans. I've bought the curtains already.

[21 : 50] Pharaoh and Ball have got some lovely, lovely colours and I've decided to use them already. So forget that. I'm just going to go ahead and build the house anyway. What would you think?

Well, I mean, you'd think that David had lost his mind, but you'd probably rightly conclude that David was going to be in a lot of trouble, but a lot of trouble for what? For what? Well, not simply for the wrong action of building the temple when he was not supposed to, but for the wrong action of failing to trust the promise of God.

That's what. Because this is it. The gospel is God freely making a generous promise and our response is not to insist on our own plans, but to trust him to follow through with his.

You see, the implication of 2 Samuel chapter 7 is that the only place of safety in our world is knowing what God's plan is and trusting it. That's the only safe place. All your other ideas and plans for your life are wobbly, aren't they?

Don't build on those because they may not happen. The safe place in our world is knowing what God has promised and trusting him to do it. It means, doesn't it, for us as Christians our two big dangers in life are these.

[22 : 59] One is a preoccupation with our own plans and the second is the assumption that God should do what I would do if I was him. Think about that first one. There is a terrible spiritual danger in self-preoccupation.

You know that, don't you? You know, if we are so preoccupied with what we want to do, with what we want to achieve with our lives, if we think this world is really about my story, about what I am doing, then actually that's the opposite of trusting in Christ and following him.

Jesus summarizes the Christian life as taking up our cross and following him, which is by definition the laying down of our own plans to follow him and trust in his.

The apostle Paul says to the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20 that he counts his life as little to him, if only he may finish the race that the Lord has set out for him. Listen, what I want doesn't really matter anymore.

It's what he wants. I'm trusting him. I'm living for him. Galatians 2 verse 20 says the same sort of thing. I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[24 : 08] This life I live trusting his promise, doing what he wants, following his way. Because trusting God, trusting the promise that he makes goes along with abandoning our own plans, just as it did for David here.

So if you're not a Christian this morning, again, this is the point for you, isn't it? This is your David-like moment, if you like. You know, it's not the prophet Nathan speaking to you. I'm speaking to you from God's word, but this is the message, isn't it?

Those things that you've planned to do, just pause on those for a moment and listen to what God has planned to do. God says to you this morning, I know that you've planned to go here, to go there, to do this, to do that, but I am promising to say through Jesus Christ, will you trust me?

Will you trust me? Come follow me. The second danger for us if we're Christians this morning is this assumption that God would have to do what we would do, as if God's priorities for our lives are the same as our priorities, that his aspirations for my career are the same as mine.

But that's really, that would be another alternative ending to the story, wouldn't it? You know, imagine this, David says to Nathan the prophet, I'm going to build a house for God. Nathan says, well, let me ask God what he says.

[25 : 20] God says, oh, what a brilliant idea, David. I've never thought of that. Please do, go ahead. Tell me what else to do. Tell me what next. That would be a total disaster, wouldn't it? All of a sudden, David would have a responsibility way above his wisdom or power because for David's joy, for God's glory, for David's hope, God must be God and David must be David.

But the truth is, sometimes we treat God as if God must do what we say. We assume that God needs to hear our good ideas and our plans and our hopes and our dreams as if God doesn't have an agenda of his own for our lives, but he does.

God in Christ has a promise for the future. It's a solid one, one that he's committed to. It's a plan not for our pleasure or for our ease in this life, but for a glorious eternal kingdom in the next.

Listen, if we've been taught anything this week and if we're going to think about one thing this evening, it's this, isn't it? God has a way of surprising us and reminding us that he is God and we are very, very temporary.

Our lives are short. Where is the solid ground in this life? Trusting God and his promise. It's the only solid ground because the only thing that you know will happen in life is that God will save his people through Jesus Christ.

[26 : 35] That you know to be true. And you and I are invited this morning to find our joy and our hope and our confidence, our consolation and our comfort in trusting God's unfailing promise kept in Jesus Christ.

Let me pray as I close. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this wonderful promise that you will send the Lord Jesus Christ to be king forever and ever.

We thank you that we see with even greater clarity than David how you've kept that promise in the first coming of the Lord Jesus. You died for our sin and rose again and ascended into heaven.

And thank you that you have promised that he is returning one day. And Lord, we pray now that you would help us to live our lives trusting in him and his promise, not in us and our own brilliant ideas. Lord, we pray that increasingly, day by day, we would take a back cross, die to ourselves and live for you and your glory. Forgive us that so often we are preoccupied with ourselves and our own ideas and we cast rather just light thoughts to you and yours.

[27 : 48] Help us to have big thoughts about who you are and little thoughts about us. In Jesus' name. Amen.