

David | The Once and Future King

The Matter of Doing

Second Samuel CH 7

11.14.21

Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, ² that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains."

³ *Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you."*

⁴ *But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, ⁵ "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? ⁶ "For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. ⁷ "Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"*

⁸ *"Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. ⁹ "I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. ¹⁰ "I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, ¹¹ even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies.*

The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. ¹² "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.""

¹⁷ *In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.*

¹⁸ *Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? ¹⁹ "And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom of man, O Lord GOD.*

²⁰ *"Again what more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, O Lord GOD! ²¹ "For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness to let Your servant know.*

²² *"For this reason You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. ²³ "And what one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods? ²⁴ "For You have established for Yourself Your people Israel as Your own people forever, and You, O LORD, have become their God.*

²⁵ "Now therefore, O LORD God, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house, confirm it forever, and do as You have spoken, ²⁶ that Your name may be magnified forever, by saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel'; and may the house of Your servant David be established before You.

²⁷ "For You, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made a revelation to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore Your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to You. ²⁸ "Now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant. ²⁹ "Now therefore, may it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You. For You, O Lord GOD, have spoken; and with Your blessing may the house of Your servant be blessed forever."

We've been witnessing a transition of power from King Saul, the mad king, the people's choice, to David who's God's choice and who's being SHAPED by God so that the desires of the human king will be conformed to the will of the divine King.

Last week we saw that when David goes from rising to reigning... when things settle down, he chooses Jerusalem as his capital AND as the center of worship for the whole nation – Jerusalem, the seat of King David and the throne of God.

We also saw that as they brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem – some were worshiping only in heart and emotion and others only by what they deemed to be proper and right and orthodox – some worshiped only in spirit and some only in truth – and both are inadequate. David worshiped in spirit and truth. He danced (like no one was watching) BECAUSE he was inwardly kindled by the truth.

Today we meet another worship disorder and it has to do with the MATTER OF DOING – doing for God as an act of worship. On the one hand, God's people are said to serve God (Rev 7.15, 22.3) but on the other hand we're told that God doesn't need anything. You know like "what do you give the man who has everything?" In Psalm 50, "I own the cattle on a thousand hills...If I were hungry I wouldn't tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains." (vv. 10-12)

So, in what sense do we DO for God and in what sense is that wrong and even impossible? E.g. Do you see your parenting as being somehow FOR God...your daily work...your tithing/charitable-giving ...your helping here at church – is it for God?

How does seeing the Big Idea of the Bible help you to stay at the center of this tension – giving to the God who doesn't need anything you have to give?

Let's look at: 1) Forgetting the Big Idea

2) Getting BACK to the Big Idea

3) Living in Harmony With this Big Idea

If you were asked to state the Big Idea of the entire Bible – could you do that and what would you say? What is the Bible ABOUT in just a phrase? Many people have read the Bible their whole lives but have never stopped to answer that theme question.

I THINK the most direct way to answer that question is in the phrase, The Kingdom of God. That's the theme of the entire Bible – even in the places where God's name isn't even mentioned...still, God is dealing with and ruling over the affairs of people/cosmos.

And in a word... the WAY God deals with fallen human beings is GRACE. David...seems to forget that. In a moment of misplaced zeal... David loses the center of his relationship to God. He knows grace...even, as we saw last week, feels grace...but somehow IN the way he relates to God... grace is no longer the lens through which he sees God and himself, that IF morally failed human beings are ever going to be in right relationship to God and remain in that position it will ONLY be by God's undeserved kindness and love.

God will have to DO something for us in order to repair a broken relationship in which WE have incurred an inestimable debt and God will have to pay that debt to restore the relationship AND then God will have to sustain what has been restored.

Or to put it very simply: God does for us – we don't do for Him. And while this may first seem like some sort of strange health and wealth sales-pitch...while it seems like we're saying that God serves US and we DON'T serve Him...that God exists for US and NOT we for Him...but in reality THIS is just a recognition of the basic difference between God and humanity.

It's an acceptance of the fact that God has everything and needs NOTHING and we have NOTHING and need everything.

Perhaps you've heard of the band, Sixpence None the Richer. They take their name from a C.S. Lewis quote about a father who brings his young son shopping for a birthday gift FOR the father.

Inside the store, the little boy comes back and asks, "Daddy, I found the present I want to buy you – it costs six-pence. Could you give me the money so I can buy it for you?"

When the dad GETS the gift – he's six-pence none the richer. Some churches sing, when they take up the offering, "We give Thee But Thine Own!" i.e. "what I'm putting in the plate is only what YOU have first put in my hand – it makes You no richer."

This is what David is NOT keeping central in his walk with God. And this same truth – the basic order of our relationship with God is taught and illustrated and stated through the whole Bible.

Here are a few examples: First, THIS passage – David wants to build a temple for God, to house the Ark. It seems logical and customary and fitting to do.

Culturally, all the Canaanite kings, when they took the throne, sort of rewarded the deity by building a temple. AND practically – David is living in a house of rich wood and stone but the Ark is in a tent – we have to put the Ark somewhere!

From an analogy to human relationships: you scratch MY back, I scratch YOURS! It's how things work!

Even from a theological/providential perspective: “God is blessing everything I do. He’s shaped/formed me, after His own heart: OBVIOUSLY, He put this desire into my heart”. And Nathan (the prophet) agrees.

Deuteronomy CH 12 points to a day when Israel will be established on their own Land and there would be one central location for worship. All systems GO!

BUT David’s zeal is still not focused on the Big Idea. Somehow, he thinks he’s doing God a favor. He’s slipped into the idea that God needs him. “Lord, I’m gonna do for YOU (like a repayment or something).”

In his zeal, David becomes a doer but it’s a deadly doing! Like the old Scottish hymn, “It Is Finished”:

*Until to Jesus’ work you cling
By a simple faith
Doing is a deadly thing
Doing ends in death

Cast your deadly doing down-
Down at Jesus’ feet
Stand in Him, in Him alone
Gloriously complete (James Proctor, b.1826)*

Now, notice two features of God’s corrective to David. First, it’s actually very gentle. It reminds us that there are shades and varieties of this deadly doing and misdirected zeal. David’s is apparently off the mark but not far from the kingdom (Mk 12.34).

Second, the way God puts David back on track – vv 5-16 are the longest speech of God since Sinai and the focus is on the real order of the divine-human relationship. After a few searching questions, God reminds David, “I took you from the pasture...I’ve been forming you to rule over My people...I’ve saved you from your enemies...I will make your name great ... I will make a HOUSE FOR YOU...”

God’s whole long, reply through Nathan is laser-beam focused on what God has done, is doing and will do for David and Israel. THAT’S THE ANTIDOTE TO DAVID’S spiritual confusion. God points to history, past, present and future – the history of Israel and David’s history with God – all about God’s doing.

Now, one way to reclaim this focus when you lose it (and if David could do it – YOU COULD TOO!) is to think about how this idea is illustrated in all of the Bible. God promises Abraham an heir/son...and then God makes Abraham/Sarah wait and trust... But when the wait goes too long for Abraham’s liking he wants to help God out...sleeps with a servant woman... The results are disastrous (deadly doing).

Martha figures Jesus Christ really NEEDS her and her service more than SHE needs Him and His life-giving word...

Peter, in the Upper Room and the Son of God comes to wash the fisherman’s feet; Peter says, “No WAY! I’m here to serve YOU! You’ll never wash me!”

And Jesus sees the deadly doing and says to Peter, “Well if that’s how it has to be – there’s the door! You don’t see the basic order of things. You don’t get the Big Idea... You're not helping; you're opposing Me. And by-the-way, I think I recognize that voice.”

And a few minutes later, Jesus puts it very starkly to all the disciples when He says, “Apart for Me – you can do NOTHING!” Here in 2nd Samuel CH 7 we want to say, “Lord, isn’t all this a bit harsh? David’s just trying to help...Peter and Martha and Abraham – they're all just trying to honor You!”

But God is saying over and over, “You can’t honor Me if you will not bow your pride under the Big Idea – you simply have nothing to give Me and I have everything to give YOU! So, see your neediness and see My utter delight in giving you all you need. Your attempts to DO for Me or repay Me are misguided at best and arrogant rebellion and deadly at worst.”

So see it in the Bible – cover-to-cover!

Second, to get back to this basic order – that God loves us with Gift-Love and that WE love Him with Need-Love (to use C.S. Lewis’ terms) we have to see that everything else in life is basically the other way around. The NT calls it “the elemental principles of THIS age”. Everything else has to be paid for.

We all live by constantly proving ourselves...always attempting to show how competent, deserving, hard-working, qualified, knowledgeable, good, loving, interesting independent, generous WE ARE.

We make a name for ourselves in every sphere and relationship where we find ourselves. Starting as toddlers, we reward each other for these things. It’s the air we breathe and the water in which we swim SO it takes a force from outside ourselves to empower us to think in this opposite direction.

People want to be your friend IF you have something to offer and ONLY God wants to be your friend if you have nothing but need. The words of the old writers and some of our flawed heroes of the Protestant Reformation reinforce this: Luther, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, they all say things like this, “I’ve been preaching this Gospel for many years and still it strikes me as exceeding odd – it continues to be hard to believe.”

John Owen (great writer in the 1600’s) wrote: “Our struggle in living the Christian life is NOT in the doing but in BELIEVING.” See? We’re naturally doers and believing and repenting, facing our moment-by-moment need and raising an empty hand to Christ’s Cross feels un-natural and IS in fact supernatural!

Believing is receiving and arrogant people (as we all are!) don’t want to receive. We want to give and do and be in the power-position so other people will owe us... BUT God will never be indebted to anyone.

A third way of getting back to this focus when we’ve lost it is to know and remind ourselves that good deeds done without this focus will become ugly.

Unless I see that God loves me with NO designs to GET from me...I will eventually use my service or good deeds to leverage His love and then to leverage the love or recognition of others... Eventually, I'll look to my acts of service and performance as crafty attempts to get God and others to like or bless me.

And when I don't get blessing from God and thanks and recognition from people it'll leave me bitter like Jonah or Martha or Peter...or manipulative like Abraham... or insecure/afraid like Saul. I'll lose my joy like the Galatians when Paul asked them, "Where then is that sense of blessing you once had?" (4.15)

One last way or rationale for returning to this focus is that it makes God famous for His grace – as it says repeatedly in Ephesians, "to the praise of the glory of His grace..." (1.6) When you see this basic order, God becomes greater in your eyes and you get happy.

And that segues into the last and briefest point: someone (maybe everyone) will object at this point, "Yeah...but someone has to put out the trash! I mean we can't all just sit around waiting on God to build our house and make a name for us... if a person doesn't work, he shouldn't eat!" (2 Thes 3.10)

Think again of Jesus Christ's words, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15.5) He's talking about living a spiritually fruitful life... People go to school, they close deals, they do laundry, people go to work, raise kids and they take out the trash WITHOUT "abiding in Christ", without even recognizing this basic order...

BUT you can't do any of these things in a spiritually fruitful way without recognizing the love of God who gave His Son to undeserving people like YOU...

The verse, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4.13) says the same thing from a positive perspective – "I can do all things in a spiritually beneficial, God-glorifying way IF I do the thing in the recognition that God is Giver and I am receiver – filling up the gas tank, brushing my teeth, loving my wife...playing tennis... praying... giving: all things however mundane IF done in conscious reliance on Jesus Christ who lived, died and rose ON MY BEHALF.

That consciousness makes changing a diaper a sacred task... BUT without that awareness, even singing hymns, prayer or building a Temple for God is NOT spiritually fruitful and may be spiritually deadly.

This teaching/understanding WON'T make you lazy but WILL save you from being a people-pleaser who's inner well-being rises and falls according to how happy you make the people around you... AND it CAN make you a person wildly liberated and truly spiritually fruitful.

It can make even the most boring and repetitive of tasks HOLY and an exercise of communion with God and JOY.