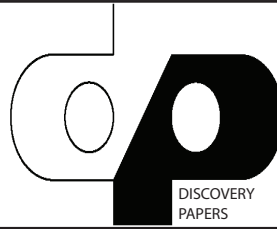


THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.



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Samuel 7:1-29
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Scott Grant
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2 Samuel 6:1-23

“Climb every mountain / Ford every stream / Follow every rainbow / Till you find your dream.” (*The Sound of Music*, 1959)

“To dream the impossible dream . . .” (*Man of La Mancha*, 1972)

“I’m in California dreaming . . .” (Adele, 2015, not to be confused with the Mammás and the Papas, 1965: “California dreamin’ on such a winter’s day.”)

Maybe some of us are in California dreaming. What happens to a dream? A long time ago a man named David was in Jerusalem dreaming. What happened to his dream, it turns out, has very much to do with our dreams.

We come, in our study of the David story to 2 Samuel 7, a constitutional text for the people of God. It features the Davidic covenant—that is, the partnership that God makes with David. The word “covenant” does not appear in the chapter, but we know, based not least on Psalm 89, that David understood that God was making a covenant with him (Psalm 89:1-4, 28, 34, 39). From this theological mountain, you can see the entire biblical story, both past and future. You can see your own story, both past and future. This is breathtaking. Climb every mountain? Climb this mountain!

Having moved the ark of the covenant, which represents the presence of the LORD, to Jerusalem, David wants to do something for the LORD.

David dreams

1 Samuel 7:1-17:

Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, 2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” 3 And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.”

4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 5 “Go and tell my servant David, “Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. 7 In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom 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, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, 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 to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” 17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

The conquest of the Promised Land, anticipated by the LORD before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, is complete (Deuteronomy 12:10-11). Having brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, David observes that his dwelling eclipses that of the LORD. David, who as king represents the rule of the LORD, reigns from a palace, but the LORD reigns from a tent, the moveable tabernacle (2 Samuel 6:2). David doesn't come right out and say it, but he wants to build a temple for the LORD. He wants to do something great for God, and the prophet Nathan tells him to follow his dreams.

The LORD says not so fast. Instead of telling David to follow his dreams, he asks a rhetorical question and gives him a history lesson. Yes, the LORD will want a temple, but now is not the time and David is not the builder. Up to this point, the LORD hasn't asked for a temple. He's moved with Israel in the tabernacle from place to place to let his people know that he is with them wherever they go. Now that Israel is settled, the time is coming for a temple.

Why not now, and why not David? Elsewhere we learn that the time is not right because though Israel has rest from its enemies, it needs to rest a little longer before building the temple (1 Kings 5:3). David has been the LORD's warrior, and the LORD wants his temple to be built by a man of peace (1 Chronicles 22:8, 28:3). Because evil entered the world, the LORD must go to war against it, but war is not his preference. When the temple finally was built and dedicated, peace offerings were prominent (1 Kings 8:63-64, 9:25). The temple was to be "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7).

Nathan withdraws the building permit.

The LORD reminds David what he has done for him, turning him from a shepherd boy into a shepherd king—a king over LORD's people, no less. It turns out that David's story echoes Israel's story. If the LORD has moved to be "with all the people of Israel," he has also been with David wherever he has gone. The LORD has not only cut off the enemies of Israel, he has also cut off the enemies of David, both inside Israel (Saul, Ish-bosheth, Abner) and outside Israel (the Philistines). David's history, then, is entwined with the history of Israel.

David's future is also entwined with the future of Israel. As soon as the LORD tells David that he will make for him a great name, he tells him what he will do for his people. What the LORD will do for David, therefore, is connected with what he will do for his people.

How so?

God dreams

David wanted to build the LORD a house. The LORD says I'm going to make you a house. Wait a minute: David already has a house—a pretty good one, too, made out of cedar (2 Samuel 5:11). Is the LORD going to build him another one? No, he's using a wordplay. David wanted to build a house of stones for the LORD; but the LORD will make a house of sons for David. The LORD redefines and expands David's vision: the builder is different, and the material is different.

The LORD is going to raise up David's offspring (literally "seed"), a noun that can be either singular or plural. One of David's sons will, in fact, build a house of stones for the name of the LORD. But that's only part of the promise—a small part, it turns out. There is this "forever" aspect of the promise.

Yes, there would be more descendants of David to follow who would also reign as kings in Israel, but they were for the most part failures, and the kingdom split in two. However, a thousand years after the promise, the apostle Peter realized that the LORD was speaking of Jesus of Nazareth, called the Son of David because of his descent from David, whom the LORD raised up (from the dead, no less!) to reign from heaven until the day he returns to consummate his reign (Acts 2:29-36). For our sins, the LORD disciplined him "with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men." The prophet Isaiah, anticipating the crucifixion of Christ, says, "and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Thus, David's future is entwined with the future of Israel, and with the future of humanity and all creation, as it turns out, because Jesus Christ will establish God's healing, loving rule over Israel, over humanity, and over all creation forever.

How about that dream, David?

David worships

2 Samuel 7:18-29:

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? 19 And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God. You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord God! 20 And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! 21 Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it.

22 Therefore 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 who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? 24 And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O Lord, became their God. 25 And now, O Lord God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. 26 And your name will be magnified forever, saying, ‘The Lord of hosts is God over Israel,’ and the house of your servant David will be established before you. 27 For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. 28 And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. 29 Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.’

David was ready to build, but after hearing from the LORD, he sits. He sits before the LORD—that is, before the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle (which he wanted to replace with a temple, by the way). Instead of talking of what he will do for the LORD, David basks in what the LORD has done—and will do—for him, for Israel, and for humanity. He prays, beginning with thanksgiving.

David was the eighth and least significant son in an insignificant family. No one would have identified him as having royal potential. David himself wouldn’t have identified himself in such a way, but the LORD chose him. David is in awe that the LORD has brought him “thus far.”

Even so, David now recognizes that his against-all-odds rise to the throne is only a “small thing” in light of the future and eternal plans the LORD has for his dynasty. The LORD has brought him thus far, but he will bring him farther still—way farther.

When evil entered the world, God promised to address it through the “offspring” (literally “seed”) of the first woman—collective descendants and an individual descendant. To do so, he first made a covenant with Abraham (the Abrahamic covenant), promising to bless the world through his descendants. Then he entered into a covenant with Abraham’s descendants, the people of Israel (the Mosaic covenant), but when they fell into idolatry, the promises once again focused on an individual, Moses, whose face reflected the glory of the LORD. The LORD gave the people of Israel his “law” (*torah*), or instruction, but they persisted in idolatry.

David recognizes that what the LORD has told him concerns not only Israel but also constitutes “instruction for mankind” (*torah*). The LORD makes a covenant with David (the Davidic covenant). Now the monarchy is in the covenant, and messianic expectations take flight. The blessing will be channeled through King David will come to fruition in the advent of King Jesus, the Son of David, and in a new covenant, in which God writes his instruction (*torah*, law) on the hearts of his people so that they could obey him from the heart, fulfilling the Mosaic covenant. David doesn’t understand all this, but he understands enough of it to break forth in praise.

Nathan told David to do what was on his “heart,” but the LORD, according to his own “heart,” has made promises to David. What’s on the LORD’s heart is infinitely greater than what’s on David’s heart. And the LORD has opened up his heart to David so that he can see it. For David, the LORD’s “greatness” is seen not only in what the LORD has done and will do—for David, for Israel, and for humanity—but also in his choice to reveal his heart to David.

Finally, David turns from thanksgiving to supplication. He asks the LORD to fulfill his promises and says that he has “found courage to pray” for fulfillment based on the LORD’s revelation to him in verses 4-17. It takes courage to pray that the LORD will do what he has promised when what he has promised is not what you have dreamed and what he has promised is so outlandish. When David prays to the LORD this way, he relinquishes control.

Look back

Some people might say, in contrast to David, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, that you have brought me *only* thus far.” They’d like to be farther along than they are; therefore, they’re frustrated either with God or themselves. Their dreams may have died. Or their dreams have come true and disappointed them nevertheless. Oftentimes, they can’t figure out whom to blame: God or themselves.

If you are disappointed with your station, and if you believe in Christ, take another look at your station. The distant and eternal future that David anticipated has come near, because the kingdom of God has come near with the coming of the Son of David and the new covenant (Mark 1:15, Hebrews 8). If God took David from the pasture to the throne, then “he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

God said to David, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.” Who was God speaking of? He was speaking of Christ, the Son of David: the writer of Hebrews quotes 2 Samuel 7:14 and applies it to Christ (Hebrews 1:5). Do you know whom else God was speaking of? Paul says he was speaking of us! (2 Corinthians 6:18) God has united us with Christ so that we are sons and daughters of God. As such, he has seated us with Christ in the heavenly places so that we reign with him even now (Ephesians 2:5-6). You don’t reign from an earthly throne in a small part of the world; no matter how far along you think you are, you are seated on a heavenly throne!

For now, you can’t get farther along than that. God has brought you farther along than he brought David, the most important king of the most important nation in history!

From the theological mountain of 2 Samuel 7, take in what God has done to take you from the domain of darkness to a heavenly throne in the kingdom of his beloved Son.

So, where do we go from here?

What now?

Do you have a dream? Most people at least hope for a better life, even if their lives are pretty good. Have you ever shared your dream with someone? That can be a vulnerable thing to do, especially if your dream is a little bit “out there.” If someone doesn’t believe in your dream, you might feel foolish not only for sharing it but also for even having it. David shared his dream with Nathan, although he wasn’t completely forthcoming, perhaps because he was afraid of looking foolish. If a confidante endorses your dream, as Nathan endorsed David’s dream, you might take that as divine affirmation, especially if it comes from some sort of authority figure. You might determine to do “all that is in your heart.”

What you want to do could be what God wants you to do. Then again, it might not be. God might want someone else to do it. He might want someone else to do it at a different time. He might not want it done at all. God had many things for David to do, but one of them was not building the temple, which is what he dreamed of doing.

Whatever your dreams, know this: God’s dreams are bigger than your dreams. You can dream. You should dream. God didn’t reprimand David for dreaming. Instead, he expanded his dream. **God dreamed the impossible dream and made it possible.**

What happened to David’s dream of building a house for the LORD? It became Jesus Christ, the Son of David. “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9). It became us, for God dwells in each of us, as individuals, but more importantly in all of us, in the church, in a collective sense (1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 2:17-22). It will become the new Jerusalem. When God gives the apostle John a vision into the distant future, he sees the new creation: “the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:1-2). What will the temple look like? John: “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Revelation 21:22). No need for a temple. God will be all in all, everywhere, filling creation.

David, with his dream of building a house for God, was in the right ballpark. He needs a bigger ballpark, though—one, say, that fills the cosmos. Start with a dream. And remember: God is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). He dreams the impossible dream and then makes it possible.

Then what?

Look ahead

The distant and eternal future that David envisioned has come near, yes, but it has not yet been fully realized. The Lord GOD, who has brought you thus far, will bring you farther still—way farther! One day, when the Son of David returns, the kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. When it does, we will “reign forever and ever,” on earth as we do in heaven, for earth and heaven will be one (Revelation 22:5). Entwined with the eternal people of God, we are caught up in an ancient story that will culminate in our arrival in the New Jerusalem, when everything will be eternally new.

When Adele is “in California dreaming,” she’s not looking ahead, she’s looking back, dreaming of “who we used to be” and longing for things to be the way they were. David also looked back, but in light of the future that opened up before him, he considered his against-all-odds journey from shepherd boy to shepherd king only “a small thing.” Think of the best thing that has ever happened to you: the best season, the best relationship, the best adventure. What is it? Do you know what it is? It’s a small thing. You ain’t seen nothing yet!

From the theological mountain of 2 Samuel 7, take in what God will do when the kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

Come before the LORD

God redefines David’s dream and expands it and sweeps us up in it. Whatever dreams we have, as those caught up in the fulfillment of David’s dream, will be more than fulfilled when the kingdom comes in full. What happens to a dream? It becomes what you could not dream, if not in this creation then in the new creation.

We know more than David did. The Son of David, whom David anticipated, has come, along with the new covenant. God has shown us far more than he showed David. God has opened up his heart to us so that we can see not only what he has done but also what he will do. Lift up your eyes, O church. Take it all in. And then do what David did.

Come before the LORD and worship.