

Instruction for Mankind

2 Samuel 7

When I first saw the news about the horrifying events in Nashville a few weeks ago at Covenant School, I heard initial reports that the shooter was a transgender person. At that point I expected that the transgender element of the story would be suppressed. Anytime you have a clearly wicked act perpetrated by a member of a group to which the media is sympathetic, you can see the media try to frame the story in a way that suppresses that bit of information. But then something happened that I didn't expect. The media, the Biden administration, and various cultural influencers decided that, rather than ignore the transgender element of this story, they would embrace it. Instead of distancing their favored group from atrocities of that dark day, they have decided to *justify* the atrocities. Yes, the shooter was transgender. And transgender people are oppressed. Tennessee has just passed two laws against the transgender movement, so they had it coming. The shooter was a victim with a legitimate grievance, so let's take this opportunity to advance transgender ideology further into our society so that transgender victims don't have to engage in any more school shootings. Our cultural leaders decided to turn this national tragedy into an opportunity for extortion. The wickedness of it all has been something to behold.

And the implication, though it hasn't been said out loud yet in so many words, is quite clear at this point: those Christian oppressors down in Tennessee deserved it. We were not even spared a moment of national grief and sympathy for the families of the victims. Immediately in the wake of such horror, political narratives started spinning. In the new Marxist hierarchy of victimhood, transgender people stand at the top of the pyramid, and conservative Christians are at the bottom, and so the path of justice means always taking one side over the other, no matter the situation. Jesus said in the text Lee preached last week, "You will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Luke 21:17). If those words weren't real to you a few weeks ago, they should be today.

We live in a toxic society in a fallen, dangerous world. The temptation will be strong for us to give in to fear and compromise our convictions in order to placate the gods of this age and avoid their wrath. And it's in moments like these that a passage like this one becomes all the more precious to us. David was a man who knew suffering and persecution. He knew what it was like to be hated by powerful enemies. And he also knew the joy of the Lord's deliverance. By the time we come to this passage, he is repeatedly referred to simply as "the king" (vv. 1-3). God had protected him, elevated him to the throne, and secured his rule over Israel. But that was all setting the stage for a promise, a covenant, that God would make with David that would be so much bigger than David. I believe there are two main passages in the Old Testament that we could call the two main pillars of the Old Testament storyline. One of them is Genesis 12:1-3, the Lord's promise to Abraham to make a great nation out of him and to bring blessing to all the nations of the world through him. The other is 2 Samuel 7, the Lord's promise to David. These two promises carry the whole story along. You see this point made in Matthew 1:1, which introduces Jesus the Messiah as "the son of David, the son of Abraham," and then traces his genealogy by noting fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile, and fourteen generations from the exile to Christ. Why does Matthew organize the history of God's saving work this way? It's because he sees the promises to Abraham and David as the two grand promises of Scripture concerning the kingdom of God. He

sees the exile as the perceived threat to those promises, the time when Abraham's descendants were taken out of the promised land and when the throne of David was left empty. And he sees Christ coming into the world as the dramatic fulfillment of both promises after it seemed that all had been lost. The Bible presents the unfolding story of God's kingdom as a story of promises made, promises apparently threatened, and promises kept.

In a cultural moment like this one, it feels like so many things we once took for granted have been shaken. But we belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28), a kingdom promised right here in 2 Samuel 7. So let's meditate on the promises of God and David's godly response to those promises this morning in order to strengthen our faith and prepare ourselves to suffer whatever we must in order to enter the kingdom of God.

Note first

1. Promises of Grace (vv. 1-17)

The context of this story is that David has brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, showing that he intends his rule over Israel to represent the rule of God. But one day while David, during an unusual time of relative peace in Israel, was dwelling comfortably in his palace, he verbalized an idea to the court prophet Nathan: "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent" (v. 2). Nathan heard the implication of what David was saying: "This situation is not fitting, so I should build a temple for the Lord." At first, before he heard anything from God, Nathan trusted David's instinct and affirmed him in it. David's motive seemed good. He wanted to honor the Lord. But both David and Nathan may also have thought along the lines of their pagan neighbors in the ancient near east. It was common for a king in that time to build or improve on the temple of a patron deity in order to secure the blessings of that deity on his kingdom. For the typical pagan king of that time, his mindset toward his patron god was, "If I scratch your back, you scratch mine."

And then the word of the Lord came to the prophet Nathan that night to communicate to David that the God of Israel is not like the gods of the nations. Notice verses 4-7: "But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, 'Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 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. 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?'''" Here in God's initial response to David we see a profound truth about who our God is. On the one hand, God says to David that he does not need a house; he has never needed one. The implication is that he is the self-sufficient, sovereign God who has all fullness in himself. As Paul expresses it in Acts 17:24-25: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." The God who is full in himself does not depend on King David to build him a house.

But more than that, think about how this response communicates the humility of God, his gracious condescension to Israel. You see, Israel had been a people on the move for a generation in the wilderness, followed by a period of conquest, followed by generations of being under

constant threat from their enemies through the period of the judges and on into the early monarchy under Saul and then David. Israel had not yet received the blessing of being settled in the land at peace, and so God has never commanded a permanent dwelling place for himself. Dale Ralph Davis puts it this way: “How can he [God] settle down when they [Israel] are unsettled? Do you see what Yahweh is saying about himself? He is the God who travels with his people in all their topsy-turvy, here-and-there journeys and wanderings. Do his people live in tents? So does he. Are they a pilgrim people on their way to the land of promise? So he is the pilgrim God, sharing the rigors of the journey with them. Perhaps we glimpse now why Yahweh wants no cedar temple yet. He must make a secure place for Israel first (v. 10). He will not rest till he gives rest to his people (cf. Deut. 12:9-11)! Can you not see the astounding condescension of our God here? How can this revelation fail to overwhelm us and move us to adoring tears?”¹ It is because he is full in himself that God has so much to give to Israel in condescending humility.

So God shoots down David’s dream of building a temple in verses 4-7. And then he pivots to promises in verses 8-17. Verses 8-9 are a covenant prologue. In biblical covenants, it is customary to begin with a prologue that recounts the history of the two parties with each other. God does that here: “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. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you.’” God has given David the blessings of election, power, and presence. God chose him from his humble circumstances, God raised him up to become ruler of Israel, cutting off his enemies before him, and God has been with him every step of the way, through all the ups and downs of David’s topsy-turvy life. This God who has shown grace to David now promises to show him yet more grace.

The promises of the Davidic Covenant come in two sets. We find the first set of promises in verses 9b-11a, and they pertain to blessings for David’s lifetime. You could summarize these blessings as promises of a great name, a place, and security from enemies. All three promises are echoes of what God had earlier promised to Abraham in the book of Genesis. Verse 9b reads, “And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.” We hear a similarity to Genesis 12:2, where God said to Abraham, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.” Verse 10 reads, “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 so we hear the echoes of Genesis 15:18: “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.’” And then in verses 10b-11a we read, “And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.” And so we hear the echoes of Genesis 12:3, where God said to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse.” God promises that within his lifetime David will see Israel inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic promises. The Abrahamic promises, in other words, are now funneled through David’s rule.

When you look back at God’s promises to Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22) and how the Scripture traces their fulfillment, you see that what we know as the Abrahamic Covenant was brought to fulfillment on two levels. One level is the kingdom of Israel, the physical offspring of Abraham who inherited the earthly land of promise. The other level is the kingdom of God, an

international people united in Jesus Christ, the true offspring of Abraham, dwelling in a new creation. The first kingdom, Israel, is a type or shadow of the second kingdom, the kingdom of God. The promises to David in verses 9-11 pertain to the first level of fulfillment, the earthly kingdom of Israel.

But then we have a second set of promises in verses 11b-16 that pertain to Israel's future beyond David but also transcend it as they point us ultimately to a greater kingdom, the kingdom of God. These are promises for after David's death, and they begin with the words in verse 11, "Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house." David wanted to build a house for the Lord, but instead the opposite will happen. God will deny David the accomplishment of his dream in order to highlight the wonder of his own grace all the more. Here there is a play on the word "house," which doesn't refer to a dwelling, but rather a dynasty, a line of descendants who will rule the kingdom after David's time. The key promise God makes to David here is that David's throne will continue beyond him. Indeed, it will continue forever, for the throne of David now becomes the focal point of the kingdom of God.

Peter Gentry² has pointed out that in the promises of verses 12-16, there are three ideas that are repeated twice: offspring, kingdom, and throne. Notice verses 12-13: "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*. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the *throne* of his kingdom forever." The same ideas are repeated in the same order in verse 16: "And your *house* [synonym for offspring] and your *kingdom* shall be made sure forever before me. Your *throne* shall be established forever." God will raise up David's offspring after him, God will establish the kingdom of Israel under the rule of David's offspring, and David's offspring will possess the throne forever. These ideas are communicated twice in verses 12-13 and 16. So what comes between these two sets of promises is the very heart of the Davidic Covenant, verses 14-15: "I will be to him [David's offspring] 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, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you." This father-son relationship between God and the house of David is the key element that sets David apart from Saul.

You see, when Saul sinned, the Lord rejected him and his house. Saul's reign was cut short by the Philistines, and aside from the brief rule of his son Ish-bosheth among the northern tribes, there is no dynasty of Saul to speak of. God did not treat Saul like a son. But it will not be so for David's house. Will David and his offspring sin? Yes, of course. Will they sin even as grievously as Saul did? Yes, they will. But as a loving father, God will discipline, but never disown, his son. The house of David may suffer. Indeed, it will suffer. But it will never be extinguished. Nothing explains the difference between David and Saul but the sovereign grace of God. Why one should be rejected and the other made a son is a mystery hidden in God. It is all of grace.

So is this promise of an offspring for David about Solomon, or is it about Christ? Yes! God promises to raise up David's immediate offspring, Solomon, who would build a house for God's name, a temple in Jerusalem. But Solomon is a type of a coming Son of David who will inherit, not the throne of Israel, but authority over the cosmos. His kingdom will have no end. He will build a spiritual house for God's name, a temple made of living stones like you and me (1 Pet.

2:4-5). Notice that the word “forever” is used three times in this passage (vv. 13, 16). As you read the biblical story, you will see the house of David reach a pinnacle in the reign of David’s son Solomon, followed by a terrible sin on Solomon’s part, a sin of promoting idolatry, that leads to a division of his kingdom and a series of Davidic kings in the southern kingdom of Judah, some of whom are godly rulers, but many of whom are wicked. Eventually, the house of David will fail and be removed from power by the Babylonians. Yet even that tragic story of failure will not extinguish the promise regarding David’s throne here.

In *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy there is recorded a poem that the hobbit Bilbo Baggins wrote about Aragorn, who was the descendant of a king named Isildur. Isildur, king of Gondor, had been seduced by the Ring of power, and that failure on his part led to his own death and the exile of his house from the throne of Gondor. In this poem, Bilbo writes about Aragorn and the broken dynasty to which he belongs,

“From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
a light from the shadows shall spring;
renewed shall be blade that was broken;
The crownless again shall be king.”

Of course, the third volume of the trilogy is entitled *The Return of the King*, and it is a story about the restoration to the throne of Gondor of a broken line. The author, J.R.R. Tolkien, very clearly sought to mirror the story of the line of David. Yes, the house of David will be reduced to ashes of exile, but from those ashes a fire will be woken, and his name is Jesus of Nazareth, son of David. Though he would be killed on a Roman cross, he would then walk out of his tomb the following Sunday to claim dominion over heaven and earth, bringing the promise of the Davidic Covenant to fulfillment. The promises of God cannot fail.

The kingdoms of this age rise and fall. The American experiment in representative democracy is being tested at this point. Maybe our republic will be revitalized at some point. Or maybe the current trends toward a total state will continue on into nightmares that we never imagined. I honestly don’t know. But I do know that the kingdom of God is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, because it rests on the promises of God. And there lies my hope. I pray for God’s blessing on the United States of America, but I rest in the certainty of the kingdom of the Son of David.

What is the appropriate response to God’s promises? Faith. When God makes a promise, we honor him by receiving and resting on that promise. David models that response for us in the second half of the passage, which records for us

2. A Prayer of Faith (vv. 18-29)

Verse 18 begins, “Then King David went in and sat before the LORD.” The Hebrew verb translated “sat” is the same word translated “lived” in verse 1. David has gone from sitting in his house to sitting before the presence of the Lord in the tent of meeting. As King of Jerusalem, heir of the priesthood of Melchizedek, David has access to the holy place. And he goes there to sit and pray. It’s interesting that there are no other examples of someone sitting for prayer in the Bible. It would have been appropriate for David to kneel, or to fall on his face, or to stand. But he sits in the presence of God, like a son sitting down to enjoy conversation with his father.

When I read verse 18 I am reminded of David's words in Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall *dwell* [same verb] in the house of the LORD forever."

David's prayer models for us how to respond to the promises of God in faith. Notice two characteristics of faith in the way he prays. The first is gratitude. David gives thanks and praise to God both for what he has done and for what he has promised to do. David looks to the past in verse 18: "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?" In verse 20 he says, "And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God!" That could be translated, "For you *have known* your servant," and in context "have known" means "have chosen in love." In verses 23-24 he reflects on all that God had done for Israel in the past, to redeem them from Egypt, give them the land of promise, and make them his holy people. David remembers God's past work, and he gives thanks.

But he doesn't stop there. Now look at verse 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!" Here David is saying, "You have already done so much for me, Lord, and yet that was nothing compared to what you have now promised to do. What you have promised to me is not narrowly for the benefit of my own house, or even for Israel. This promise concerning my offspring is a promise for humanity." I think David heard in the background of God's promise about his own offspring an echo of the age-old promise that one of Abraham's offspring would bring blessing to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 22:18). And that promise itself hearkens back to an earlier promise that one day an offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, freeing humanity from the serpent's dominion (Gen. 3:15). David sees that the promises of a Messiah to come are now being focused on his house. The hope of humanity itself has now come to rest on the house of David. And David is struck with wonder, giving thanks to God.

I want to draw out two quick observations here about David's response of gratitude that are instructive for us. One is that David's original dream of building God a temple seems to have disappeared from his mind. David doesn't complain that he doesn't get to fulfill his dream. He doesn't lament that he doesn't have the opportunity to serve God in the way he thinks he has been gifted to do. David is not on a journey toward personal self-fulfillment under the auspices of honoring the Lord. He is overwhelmed with the joy of simply receiving by faith the blessing that God has for him. Is it possible that you have confused knowing the Lord with fulfilling your own dreams of serving the Lord in the way that you want to? Is your joy in the Lord measured by the extent to which he allows you to accomplish something for him, or have you learned how to come before him with nothing in your hand and simply receive his promises in faith? Have you learned the joy of genuine gratitude before God?

Another quick observation here is that David gives thanks for blessings he has not yet received. Did you know that you can thank God for what you only possess by faith, by promise, and not yet in reality? Gratitude is not only for past blessings. It is also for promises that still await fulfillment. Those promises, because they are from God, are certain, absolute, and infallible. So let us thank God for them as we live by faith.

A second characteristic of faith in David's prayer is confident petition. Notice David's petitions to the Lord, first in verse 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." Then in verse 29: "Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you." In short, David prays, "Do as you have promised, Lord." In fact, in verse 27 David specifically notes that through God's word of promise, David has found the courage (literally "his heart") to pray with confidence that God would fulfill his word.

There is a sub-biblical way of thinking about prayer that would say, "If God said he is going to do it, then my prayer for it doesn't matter. I should focus on praying for things where I can make a real difference." The Bible never teaches us to think that way, as though God has his part over here and we have our part over here, and the end result is some synthesis of the two things as we partner together in prayer. No, God has planned and promised certain ends that he will accomplish, period. And he has also planned and promised that one of the means of bringing those ends about is when his people pray for them. And so our prayers are most powerful when we pray God's own promises back to him, with our prayers serving as an appointed means to fulfill what God has decreed for his glory and our good.

There are certainly times when we desire blessings that God has not specifically promised. For example, a loved one has cancer. We should pray for healing, making our requests known to God. We should pray knowing it is his delight to bless us, knowing that he is fully capable of healing with or without the means of medicine, knowing that many blessings of healing have been granted to others in the past. But without a specific promise from God that he intends to heal in this situation, we must pray the way Jesus did in the garden: "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). We seek blessings from our loving Father, and we leave the outcome in his hands. But we can also make petitions of God without having to say, "Not my will, but yours be done," when we know that we are praying specifically for what God has promised. If God has already promised it, then it is his will. We don't have question that.

Preeminently, the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13) encapsulates for us the requests that are according to God's promises. When we ask God to make his name holy and exalted in creation, when we ask him to bring his kingdom, to accomplish his perfect will on earth as it is heaven, when we pray for our daily needs, for the forgiveness of our sins, and for protection from our enemy, *these are all things God has promised*. We don't have to say, "Come, Lord Jesus! Nevertheless, not my will be yours be done." God has promised that our Lord will come to triumph over his enemies, to deliver his people, and to reveal his kingdom. And we should pray confidently to that end.

But do you ever think to yourself, "Praying for specific circumstances in my life feels real. Praying for Christ to return and God's kingdom to be revealed feels remote, distant, pie-in-the-sky"? I know that feeling. And I would say that's a problem with our own hearts. We are far too prone to let immediate concerns swallow up in our consciousness what God has said is more important, more enduring, in a sense more *real* than anything else: his kingdom. Meditate on the promises of God so that your view of reality is shaped by them. And then pray in faith for what God has promised.

Now, let's go back to a portion of Lee's text from last week. Luke 21:17 says, "You will be hated by all for my name's sake." That prediction from our Lord has never seemed more real to me than it does now in the wake of the Nashville shooting. But don't forget verse 18 that follows: "But not a hair of your head shall perish." Why not? Because, if you are in Christ, you belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken, the kingdom of David's Son, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. May we not walk in fear, but rather in gratitude and confident hope that these promises belong to us too. After all, this is instruction for mankind. Amen.

1 Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2018), 85-86.

2 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 447.