

Big Dreams Matter

2 Samuel 7.1-17

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Introduction to the Morning Lesson

I'm going to be preaching today and for the next two Sundays about the faith and foibles of David, Israel's greatest king. David's story is told primarily in the Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel and more idealistically in 1 and 2 Chronicles. We also gather some important details about him from the Psalms, many of which were written either by David or about him. Throughout the Bible we see the importance of David's story in many ways, not the least of which is the theme of the kingdom of God, a theme always looked at through the lens of David's kingship. Of course, in human terms Jesus was a descendant of David and Christ's kingship must always be seen in the light of his great ancestor.

David was the seventh and youngest son of Jesse, the least likely to be anointed king. But God chose him and commanded Samuel, the great prophet and priest, to anoint David, supplanting the aborted kingship of Saul. As a boy David was a shepherd who watched carefully over the family's flocks of sheep, a historical detail that also expresses another important biblical theme. For the Bible describes God as our shepherd and Jesus as the Good Shepherd, the voice of whom is known by his sheep.

Today's text picks up David's story many years after his shepherding days. King David has consolidated his realm, subdued his enemies, and moved the capital to Jerusalem where he has built himself a marvelous palace, described as a house of cedar, consider a luxury wood in those days. Since his palace is so marvelous, he decides he should build a similarly marvelous house or temple for God. That's where we'll begin today. Let's read it in 2 Samuel 7.

2 Samuel 7.1-17 (NRSV)

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live 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 and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" 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 prince over my people Israel; 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. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and

will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers 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. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth 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. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Introduction

In light of this text I want to talk about why having big dreams matters and I'll begin with a simple but pointed question. Does anything we do matter? We usually don't ask this question out loud. But it tends to bump around in us when we are feeling unappreciated, lonely, or afraid. Maybe we've really knocked ourselves out on some project and the boss hasn't noticed. Maybe our spouse just isn't paying attention. Maybe our kids sail on by us, oblivious to all that we're doing for them. Maybe our kids are grown and don't call anymore. Maybe we are the kids and mom or dad haven't noticed how we're trying to do things to please them. The question can arise in so many different ways. But it sounds so self-pitying and none of us likes to come off that way. So we don't ask the question out loud.

But I want to ask it out loud this morning and as I ask it I want you to ask it. I hope by asking if what we do matters, we can each find some answers for our own life. Does anything we do matter?

ONE: God knows where we live

Yes, it does. First of all, it matters because God knows where we live which means that God cares for us as individuals. In today's text the Lord said to David, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep." Without embarrassment the Bible always remembers that David, for all his eventual greatness, was once a simple shepherd boy tending flocks of sheep. In fact the biblical narrative implies that one reason David achieved so much is that he never lost the common touch. He always remembered from whence he came and God knew the common pastures of David's life.

God knows ours as well. God knows where we live. We may live our lives unknown, unnoticed, unappreciated, certainly by the *PEOPLE* magazine kind of mentality, perhaps even by many people who are close to us. But God knows all of that. God sees us just as we are and begins with us there.

This is remarkably important. For in a world increasingly impersonalized can anyone assert with any true confidence that an individual counts for something? Or anything? We can. But we dare such assertions only, I suggest, because we can claim that God cares for us and knows us as individuals. And the fact that God cares for us as individuals relieves us of a terrible

burden, the burden of having to prove ourselves worthy.

Remember the question so often asked of us when we were young? “What do you want to do when you grow up?” Nothing wrong with that question, I suppose. But I wonder if it unconsciously reinforces the notion that growing up really means doing a certain kind of work. But what we do is very different from who we are. What we do may relate to how the world judges success. But who we are gets at where we really live, inside ourselves. The point is that our *being* — who we are — is much more important than our *doing*.

I think I started to understand the importance of being over doing when I began to realize that I was not going to do everything I wanted or hoped or dreamed. I had grown up with the notion that I could do literally anything, that if I just applied myself, then anything was possible. I could do science, sports, politics, music, business, engineering, medicine. But as time went by I realized that I couldn’t do all those things. There are many things for which I have not the aptitude, attitude, or ambition. Even within the fields I have chosen, there are many things I’m just not going to accomplish. In coming to this understanding I don’t think I have minded the years as they have increased. I certainly don’t want to go back or to hang on to the past even if it were possible. But what I have minded is the time, not its passing but its lessening. So much to do, so little time. Robert Frost said it famously: “But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.”¹

The important thing to remember in all of this is that what we do doesn’t much impress God. God knows us just as we are and knows where we live. Not just the fourth house on the right or the blue condo on the corner. God knows where we really live in the depth of our being and loves us still.

Knowing this calms the fear described in a poem by W. H. Auden. In 1939 the great poet sat in a nightclub in New York City and was overwhelmed by the desperation around him. He jotted down these words.

Faces along the bar
 Cling to their average day:
 The lights must never go out,
 The music must always play ...
 Lest we should see where we are,
 Lost in a haunted wood,
 Children afraid of the night
 Who have never been happy or good.²

We may not always be happy and we know we’re not always good. But God knows that because he knows where we live and loves us still. That’s why what we do matters.

¹ From “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost (1874-1963). He was America’s unofficial poet laureate who wrote of rural New England, e.g., “The Road Not Taken.”

² “September 1, 1939” by W. H. Auden. *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945) 58.

TWO: God wants us to have big dreams

And because what we do matters, God wants us to have big dreams. That's my second point today. God wants us to have big dreams.

David had a big dream. We're not sure how he got it. Perhaps the dream even resulted from a guilty conscience. David won himself a kingdom. His enemies were subdued except, perhaps, the enemy of his own sinfulness. We'll take up that part of the story next week. But on the surface at least, David and Israel were at peace. There was time to begin thinking about other things.

So David said to Nathan, his prophet and friend, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." In other words, the great king David was going to build the great King of heaven and earth a home, a temple to visibly center the teaching and worship of the most high, sovereign Lord, the one true God. A big dream. "This is the God who brought us out of Egypt and made us his people through his servant Moses. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is God Almighty, the Holy One of Israel. I'll build him a home," David said. What a dream!

But notice something critically important. The idea of building a wonderful temple for God was David's dream and not God's desire. God had something different in mind and that is shown in a wonderful play on words. God said, "Are you the one to build me a house to live in?... the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house." (17.5, 17.11) In Hebrew the same word can be translated either as "house" or "dynasty." So God is saying to David, "Are you going to make me a house?" (that is, a temple?). "No, I'm going to make you a house" (that is, a dynasty). The kingdom of God was to come about through David and through David's line. That's the *really* big dream, not what we are going to do for God but what God wants to happen in us.

What does God want to happen in us? Think back to David. Remember it was in the shepherd fields of Bethlehem that as a young boy he started to dream the dreams of a kingdom. Did he learn to think then of grandeur and luxury? Perhaps. But most of all he learned at an early age to sing about praising and trusting God. Did he learn early on to dream of military power and political glory? Perhaps. But most of all he dreamed that God's glory would take hold of him.

You see, the real dreams of life are not the dreams of accomplishment as important as accomplishment is. The true dreams, the ones really worth having, are the ones about letting God take hold of us and make us his person. The truly grand dreams are the spiritual ones, the ones that open us up more to Christ being active in our living. It is the spiritual that is important and the biggest dream of all is to dream of God getting more and more into our lives. God wants us to have big dreams.

Conclusion

At my first church there was a dear-hearted soul named Almer. He was limited in certain ways including his mental capacities. But nary a single limitation put any hindrance on who he was. Almer was in church every Sunday, always with a smile. Sometimes he would greet you with a verse of scripture he thought might be an encouragement. He stood at the church's front door and welcomed everyone with a warm handshake. Almer made it a point to make sure the door was held open for any who needed it and many who didn't. When asked he recited his

theme verse.

For a day in thy courts
is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper
in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (Psalm 84.10)

Would that we who are richer in mind and pocketbook, in knowledge and skill and sophistication, give as big a percentage of who we are as did Almer and all the Almers of God's kingdom.

Does anything we do matter? It surely does for God knows us as we are in the pastures of our lives and calls us to be his people. We don't have *to do* to impress God. We only have *to be* God's people in the ordinary circumstances of our living. For the biggest dream is the dream of letting the Lord live in us more and more each day.