

There's an old joke about former bitter football rivals Bo Shembechler who coached Michigan and Woody Hayes who coached Ohio State. When Woody died and went to heaven he was greeted by St. Peter who showed him to a lovely little two bedroom ranch home decorated tastefully in OSU scarlet and gray. It was a nice place, but as Woody was exploring the back yard he looked up and saw a gigantic mansion on the hill, painted in maize and blue with a big block M flag flying in the front yard. Woody turns angrily to St. Peter and says, "Why in the world does Bo get such a big house?" St. Peter says, "Oh...that's not Bo's house, that's God's house." That joke was a lot funnier back when Michigan had decent football team.

In today's scripture we hear about King David's plans to build God a house. But God's got bigger plans. Hear this word from 2 Samuel.

2 Samuel 7:1-16

1 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 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." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; 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: Are you the one to build me a house to live 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 and a tabernacle. 7 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?" 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 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 live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers 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 ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth 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 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. 15 But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

This is the word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God!**

So David wants to build God a house. It's a reasonable thing to do, after all. Israel was living in relative peace after having conquered all their enemies. David had just become king, unified the northern and southern tribes, and moved the capital city to Jerusalem, where he ceremoniously brought the Ark of the Covenant to reside. Then David looks around and says, hey wait a second. I'm living in this really nice palace and yet God's house is this little tent. Maybe that's not right. Let's fix it. His right hand man Nathan says Go for it! God is with you!

God is with you. Now that's certainly a biblical promise that we can stand on. God is always with us. During this Advent season we celebrate that very theme. One of the names given to Jesus, Emmanuel, means exactly that – God with us. God promises throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to be with us. Leading up to Jesus' birth God promises to be with us. And Jesus himself as he's ascending to heaven promises to be with us always. That gives us great comfort, especially in difficult times. When things aren't going our way it's good to know that God knows our sorrows and carries them with us and for us. God is with us in times of trial.

But what about when things are going well? When we look around and see the boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places for us. When our vocations are fulfilling, our souls and bodies well nourished, our families and friends in harmony, and our bank accounts in the black – God is certainly with us then, too, right? Absolutely. But here's where the danger comes. Things were going great for David. He'd gone from little shepherd boy to king of Israel – not a bad job promotion. His armies had defeated all his enemies, and Israel was at peace. He was living in a lavish new palace. Life was good. God was good to David. Even called him a man after God's own heart. But yet, maybe that's what made David vulnerable too – susceptible to the kind of pride and sin we see with Bathsheba just a few chapters later. But because here things are going so well, surely God is with me, David thinks. And Nathan agrees. I'll build God a house!

But God says not so fast, David. Who's running the show here, anyway? Who do you think is responsible for all your good fortune? God reminds David who the real builder is – the one who not only gave David that awesome job promotion and sweet palace but also rescued the entire nation of Israel from persecution long before David was on the scene. God reminds him in v6 "I haven't lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I've been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle." The Hebrew for moving about literally means walking back and forth – God has been active, pacing back and forth, on the move, getting stuff done, and instigating every good thing that's happened since the Israelites left Egypt. And I never needed a house to do that, God says. Who do you think you are to presume to know what I need?

Do you ever have those bible verses that just stand out to you for whatever reason? One of my favorites comes from Psalm 50. The psalmist talks about the glory and majesty of God all around us, and yet the Israelites have failed to acknowledge God's greatness. They bring God puny offerings without any sense of sacrifice or thanksgiving for them. God rebukes them for their thoughtless offerings and tells them "10 For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine." And here's my favorite part. In verse 12 God says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine." If I were hungry I wouldn't tell you. Who do you think you are? You think I need your offerings? Who are you to build me a house, David? Don't you know I'm the one calling the shots here? I'm the one making things happen, not you. All this is God's work. God is the initiator, the first one to make a move, and the giver of all good gifts.

Today's scripture is a warning against putting our own plans before God's plans. Have you ever wanted something so bad that you convinced yourself it must be God's will that you have it? Have you ever been so sure God was calling you to do something only to realize later that those were your plans, not God's?

God is indeed *with us*, no matter what decisions we make. But we experience life more abundantly when realize we are *with God*. When our desires are shaped by God's plans rather than the other way around. When we stop to ask, God what are you doing? Rather than running ahead full steam with this

awesome thing we're doing "for God" even though God never asked for it. What God asks for is our heart, and our willingness to follow the work that God is already up to. God is with us, yes. But we need to be with God as well. Everything starts with God. Not us.

But here's the good news about God's plans not always lining up with our plans. God often has bigger and better things in mind than we could possibly fathom. David is talking about building God a house. A literal house. A place where people can gather to worship the most high God. That's a good thing. And it turns out God does have plans in mind for a glorious temple. But it's David's son Solomon who will get to build that. But look at what else God does. You want to build me a house, David? I'm going to build you a house – and it's not just for you but for all my people. Verse 10 – 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... God's plans are bigger than just a house. And they're for all of God's people, not just David. God's plans are always bigger than ours.

I love seeing God's plans play out in ways we never expected or could have planned. Last spring I had a chance to travel to Patzibal, Guatemala with one of our church mission teams. Boone UMC has been sending teams to this little village for over a decade now. This mission started out as, you guessed it, a building project. We went to build a house where people could worship God. After completing that work, we heard about another worshiping community who wanted to do the same. So we partnered with them. As the building came together, we started asking about other needs in the community. We learned that one of the biggest needs is scholarship money for education.

Boone UMC currently partners with an organization to provide scholarships for nearly 100 children to attend school in Patzibal. In a place where the average family income is \$1000 per year, there's just not any money to send kids to school. These kids would have no chance at an education without our support. George Didier, who's been part of our crew from the beginning, recently returned from Patzibal and he had this to report about our scholarship program.

"Monday morning, the 17th of November, was undoubtedly the best highlight from all of my time in Patzibal. The scene was a 3-hour church celebration service for eight senior graduates. Never before had Patzibal even imagined that eight senior graduates would cross the stage at one time to receive the recognition and praise of the congregation and Patzibal community. Get this: All of these graduates were our scholarship students, and all reside in Patzibal."

Friends I can't begin to tell you what an impact this scholarship program has had on that little village. Most kids don't make it out of the 3rd grade before they drop out of school to find jobs to provide for their families. And now Patzibal has eight high school graduates. That's eight families that now have a chance to break out of the cycle of abject poverty. That's the kind of thing that can transform an entire community. Can you even imagine how good that good news sounds to our friends in Patzibal? That's the gospel in action. That's God moving, walking back and forth across a graduation stage. That's God moving, bringing new life in ways we never imagined. We went to Guatemala to build God a house. But God sent us there to build God's kingdom. God always has a bigger picture in mind than what we can see.

The same is true when look at the rest of today's scripture. God is up to something bigger. This passage starts by David wanting to build God a house. And God takes it to the next level. God promises to build a house for all of Israel. Then God promises even more for David's son.

Listen to verse 13 and 14: 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 shall be a son to me...

Now in these verses God is talking initially about David's son, Solomon, the one who eventually builds the temple in Jerusalem. But as followers of Jesus, does that language not resonate with deeper meaning for us? Church, this text, like all of Hebrew Scripture is pointing directly to Jesus. Listen again.

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 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.

Now obviously Christ didn't sin. But he was surely beaten with blows inflicted by human beings while he took upon himself the sin of the entire world. And Jesus was certainly a son to God, through whom God established the throne of God's kingdom forever.

I read an interesting article this week advocating that we all tear out one page out of every single bible. Can you guess which page it is? It's the one right between the end of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew. The mostly empty one that simply reads: "The New Testament." Because as soon as we read that we naturally think that everything before it is old and therefore somehow irrelevant to us today. But nothing could be further from the truth. There's a common church complaint – not in this church, of course, but in others – about preaching too much from the Old Testament. "As Christians, we're New Testament people!" they say. That's true, but where do you think the New Testament derives its meaning? That's like wanting to read *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy without first reading *The Hobbit*. Sure, you could do it, but why would you? You'd miss out on so much!

Our text from 2 Samuel is part of the bigger story of salvation that God weaves throughout the entire bible, not just the New Testament. Salvation culminates in the NT but all of scripture points us to Jesus. That's why it's so important that the gospels aren't the only scripture we read. We read the whole book. In fact, when we read the NT we're actually reading the OT because the NT directly quotes the OT 343 times and alludes to it over 2300 times.¹ The entire bible is one unified story of God's salvation.

So if you would, please pick up the bible in front of you, find that NT cover page, and tear that thing right out! Just kidding, don't do it. I thought about leading us in a *Dead Poets Society* moment today, but I don't want anyone to quit the church while Jason's out of town. We're not going to tear out that page, but remember the point!

And here's that point illustrated. Listen to these words from the gospel of Luke and tell me they don't have deeper meaning after having spent time in 2 Samuel today.

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, **of the house of David**. The virgin's name was Mary... 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called **the Son of the Most High**, and the Lord God will give to him **the throne of his ancestor David**. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and **of his kingdom there will be no end.**"

¹ http://www.theopedia.com/New_Testament_use_of_the_Old_Testament

Doesn't that sound familiar? Isn't it even richer, more beautiful, and more meaningful? Jesus is the fulfillment of everything we read from 2 Samuel today. Jesus is the fulfillment of the whole of scripture. God's word, made flesh.

And so a passage that starts with David wanting to build God a house ends with God showing us what building a house really looks like. God takes it to the next level. God ups the ante. God builds the house of David not as a physical structure but as an everlasting dynasty. And God builds God's house, God's church on earth, through David, Solomon, all the way through to Jesus, where God himself comes to earth to build his Church. Not a building that can be destroyed but a glorious bride comprised of people, from every tribe and nation. You and I and all God's people – temples of the Holy Spirit. God with us, and God within us.

This is what we celebrate in Advent. The God of the universe coming down and building a house from the ground up. A house that's always under construction, a work in progress. A house that imagines and promises a better future. It's a slow process, but God's house is always inching toward completion, gaining more beautiful features, textures, and rooms. And throughout the building process, God is always full of surprises – forming, shaping, and molding God's people into something more incredible than any of us could have asked for or imagined. God is still moving and active. God is still pacing back and forth among his people, building a house that will never be destroyed, building an everlasting kingdom. O that Jesus would bring his work to completion and do it soon! Until then, may we find ways to join in the building. Amen.