**When God Says No!**

**2 Samuel 7:1-18**

7/12/15

Thought for Meditation:

 That which is honestly meant to be a means to the more effective worship of God so easily degenerates into becoming an end in itself. The devotion which should be given to God alone becomes attached to the maintenance and preservation of the hallowed structure, the traditional ritual, the system of ecclesiastical prerogatives, the power of a priestly hierarchy. *Ganse Little, “Interpreter’s Bible; vol. 2”*

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 During my junior year of college I had the sense that God was calling me into ministry. I didn’t know what that would look like, maybe as a pastor, maybe as a missionary, or something else. I started to explore what God wanted. After I graduated I spent a year as an intern at my home church. I had a wonderful time there seeing what pastoral ministry was like.

The following year I wanted to experience some type mission work. I sent out forty to fifty applications to a variety of mission and service agencies. Some of them were Presbyterian, some were from other denominations and some nondenominational organizations. I sent out applications to India, South America, the Middle East, Europe and a number of other places throughout the world. I would have gone anywhere and done anything to share God’s love and the good news of Jesus Christ. I kept getting back the same answer; “No thank you. No thank you. No thank you.”

I ended up learning about and being accepted as a Volunteer In Mission at a Children’s Center in Buckhorn, Kentucky. I spent a year in the hollers of Kentucky working with kids who for any number of reasons were not living with their families. I discovered two things at Buckhorn. First, the work I enjoyed most was not working with children who had terrible family backgrounds but working in the local church – probably God was calling me to pastoral ministry. Second, I met this cute chick named Tanya! ☺

 I can look back now and say that going to Buckhorn was one of the best things that ever happened in my life. But the truth is, it was very difficult to hear all those “Noes” to my desire to serve God someplace in the world. It shook my faith and made me question my call to ministry. I have a sense that David may have had a similar reaction when God said “No” to him.

David had become the king of Israel, moved his capital to Jerusalem and brought the ark into the city. All of his enemies had been defeated and a royal palace had been built for David. Then David had an idea. Maybe he could build a house for God, a temple where the ark could stay. It would be protected and safe. People could come to the Temple and worship God. David had the resources to make a magnificent and beautiful temple that would inspire people to worship.

He asked Nathan, the prophet, what he thought about the idea. Nathan said “Sounds great to me. Go for it.” Nathan spoke too soon. That night God spoke to Nathan and told him to tell David “No.” God said a lot more than that. We will look at that in a moment. But the basic answer to David’s desire to build a temple is “No.” Please notice that David’s desire was not wrong. It wasn’t sinful. It just wasn’t God plan.

God answers our prayers in a variety of ways. One of the ways is by saying “No.” When has God said “No” to you? A young couple falls in love, gets married and has wonderful dreams for their family. Then they discover that they can’t have children. So they pray. You go to college, plan a career and then look for a job. You don’t expect to get rich but you hope for something that is inspiring and pays the bills. So you pray, but every place you apply says that they want someone with experience. You try to take care of your body. You hope to stay healthy. Then you get a diagnosis of cancer, or diabetes, or arthritis, or some other health issue that keeps you from living the abundant physical life you want. So you pray. None of those desires are wrong or sinful. But God says “No!”

How do you respond when God says “No”? Notice what David did. “King David went in and sat before the Lord” (2 Sam. 7:18a). The ark was the throne of God. It symbolized the presence of God. It was inside a tent in the city of Jerusalem. David went into the tent and sat in God’s presence. How often do you sit in God’s presence? By yourself, just you and God, listening? David also prayed. “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” (2 Sam. 7:18b). This was a statement of humility and praise. David recognized that he was nothing and God was everything. David went on to give thanks for the promise that God had made to David.

When God says “No” we don’t have to like the answer. In fact that would be dishonest. We don’t need to feel guilty. God isn’t necessarily punishing us or rejecting us. God’s “No” provides the opportunity to learn how to trust. Will we continue to turn to God when we are disappointed in him? Will we continue to worship God when we are angry at him? That is faith at its best. We trust that God has something different for us, something better. We trust that God is still at work in our lives. We trust that God’s promises are still true.

When I chose this story for today I thought that this would be a simple sermon about prayer and how we respond when God says “No.” It certainly is that, but as I read and studied this passage I realized that it is much, much more. One commentary said that this passage contains “the most crucial theological statement in the Old Testament.” There are some wonderful truths here about God. Let me share with you two of them.

First, this passage points to a tension that exists between the Ark and the Temple. The Ark is a symbol of God’s freedom and mobility. Yahweh, the God of Israel is different from the other gods of that time. To get these other gods to help you there needed to be a temple and sacrifices. Yahweh didn’t need a temple to bring salvation to the people of Israel. The Exodus happened without a temple. The Ark is easily moved from one place to another, and even if the Ark doesn’t move God still moves where God wants. God is free to do what God wants. The Ark is a reminder that we cannot control God.

The Temple is a symbol of God’s centralized presence. The Temple is the place that you know God is present. You can always find God there. The Temple gives a permanent legitimacy to David and his royal regime. The Temple has the potential to be a place of beauty and inspiration.

If you read through our passage you realize that this tension between the Ark and the Temple is not resolved. It starts with David wanting to build a temple, but God says no. The ark is all that Israel needs. But toward the end of the passage God promised that David would have a son who would build a house, a temple, for God. We know that Solomon fulfilled that promise, and through the rest of the Old Testament story the Temple is the primary symbol of God’s presence.

This tension between the Ark and the Temple still exists. Over the years I have worshipped in many different places, from large cathedrals to intimate sanctuaries, from mountaintops to living rooms. For several months Tanya and I went to a new church that hadn’t yet built a sanctuary. They worshipped in a school gymnasium. I know that God was there, but I prefer a sanctuary, a place that is set apart for worship. I like the idea of the church as a Temple. However, we must never forget the Ark. God can be anywhere and we can worship anywhere. The God we worship is not limited to a sanctuary or a temple. God will not be controlled or tamed. God is free to go where God wants. That is what Jesus was all about. He was born in a way that no one expected. He hung out with people who were not religious. He was God, yet he died on the cross. We must live with both the Ark and the Temple.

There is a second theological idea in this passage. God’s covenant with David is an example of God’s unconditional love. In the Old Testament there are two types of covenants between God and the people of Israel. The first is called a Suzerain-vassal covenant. It’s between a king and his subjects. This is a conditional covenant. The king promises that he will protect the people and provide them with land and food and whatever they need to live. But the promise depends on the people obeying the kings laws. “I’ll do this if you do this.” The covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, through Moses, is this type of covenant. Yahweh promises to be Israel’s god, to protect them and bless them, if the people follow the laws, the Ten Commandments.

The second type of covenant is called a Royal Grant covenant. In this the king gives land or other things to a beloved and faithful servant. It is usually passed on to the children of the servants. This second type of covenant is unconditional, and it is the type of covenant that God made with David. If you read through our passage you get a whole litany of what God has done for David. God says to David, “I took you from being a shepherd and made you a king. I have always been with you. I defeated your enemies and I will continue to defeat them. I will make your name great. I will make a house for you.” There is a play on words here. Our passage starts with David wanting to make a house for God, a temple. God says “No, you’re not going to make a house for me. I am going to make a house for you.”

Finally, God promises that David would have a son, who would become king. Even when that son sins and turns away from God, God would not reject that son. David’s sons and grandsons would be king forever. This is the beginning of the promise of the Messiah, a promise that was fulfilled in Jesus. The covenant that God made with David and the covenant that we have with God through Jesus is unconditional. It is based on grace. God loves you and there is not a thing you have to do to deserve it. In fact, there is nothing you can do to deserve it. It is all grace.

Last Sunday as I drove home I stopped about a half a mile from our house. There was a lemonade stand in a driveway, with a couple of kids selling lemonade, supervised by mom. I admit, I am a sucker for lemonade stands. To me, they are a reminder of grace.

 To be honest with you, the lemonade at this stand was not nearly as good as the cup I had during our fellowship time. The lemonade at the stand was obviously from a powdered mix. It wasn’t too strong or too weak – I’ve had both of those at lemonade stands – but it was warm. They charged 50¢ for a small cup and I left a 50¢ tip, not because the lemonade was so great or the service was outstanding. It was simply a small act of grace. I have so many blessings that I don’t deserve. My life has overflowed with God’s grace. Maybe I can share a little bit of grace with others.