

Everlasting Kingdom - 2 Samuel 7

Date: 21 April 2024, 3rd Sunday after Easter

Location: St George's Battery Point

Series: Everlasting Kingdom - 2 Samuel

Texts: 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2, Mark 1:9-11

As many of you know, I'm a big fan of fantasy literature. When I filled out the application form to study theology, one question was, what are the top 5 influential Christian books you've read. Now before you ask, no, you couldn't say the Bible. But the only book I can remember putting down was *The Lord of the Rings*. The thing with fantasy literature is that it always follows some well worn plot lines. There's an ancient evil that threatens the kingdom. A hero must go on a quest, fight the monster and rescue the kingdom. Some scholars argue that actually all novels boil down to 7 different plots and that is because these reflect the human condition, they help us make sense of our experience of life in this world and our hopes for the future. One of the common fantasy plots is the return of the king. There's an ancient promise that one day a king will come to defeat evil and rescue the kingdom. Now I'm not sure how widespread that plot is in different cultures around the world, but the reason it is baked into Western culture is because of our text today. This is *the* ancient prophecy which gives birth to a whole raft of prophecies about a king who will one day come.

The book of Samuel begins with a cry of hope. The nation of Israel is in turmoil and Hannah is longing for a child. Fast forward and in our text today we come to the high point of the whole book. We see it in those opening words.

After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him

God has raised up a king for Israel, David, a man after God's own heart. Hannah's son Samuel had anointed him. David has established Jerusalem as his capital. He has led her against her enemies and now the king and the nation have rest from their enemies. What else could the king hope for? He lives in a palace, but the ark of God remains in a tent. So he wants to build a temple for God.

At this point Nathan the prophet enters for the first time and delivers an oracle to David from God himself. This prophecy in 2 Samuel 7 is an absolutely pivotal moment that shapes the entire rest of the Bible. What God promises David here becomes central to Jewish faith and the trajectory of hope throughout the Old Testament, and even to today. The language of the whole story shifts as if to signal that we are standing atop the mountain gazing forward into the distant future. Because for the rest of Samuel, the plot unravels. Or rather, we see

David fall from grace and how this spirals out into his family and the nation. David in Jewish history was held up as Israel's greatest king, yet the book of Samuel records his failures at length. The Jewish scribes who put the book of Samuel together, looking back, saw this prophecy as one where God would one day raise up a king who would transcend the human failings that so beset David and indeed all Israel's kings. Fast forward a thousand years and the New Testament claims that what is promised here is fulfilled in Jesus. This text then, is key to understanding who Jesus is and the whole storyline of the Bible. So today we'll gaze out from the mountain top on the hope that is promised, how it's fulfilled in Jesus and how this shapes Christian faith and hope today. We'll look at 2 points - "The Lord will establish a house for you" and "He will be my Son".

"The Lord will establish a house for you"

This whole chapter turns on a play on the word "house". The scene opens with David settled in his house. In verse 2 he says, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

Then, in verse 5-7 God says to David,

"This is what the LORD says: are you the one to build me a *house* to dwell in? **6** I have not dwelt in a *house* from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. **7** Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a *house* of cedar?'"

Then in verse 11 the promise comes:

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: The house David wanted to build was a temple for God. Now there's nothing wrong with his hope to do so. But God turns this on its head. It's not David who will build a house for God, rather it's God who will build a house for David, that is a *dynasty*. And so the prophecy finishes, verse 16,

Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."

This is the key Messianic promise that runs from this point through the rest of the Old Testament and into the New. That is that one day there will be a descendant of David who will reign over David's throne for ever. Before we come to how this promise is fulfilled, let's look at how the promise is fleshed out in these verses.

Israel

First, the text takes us back to that pivotal moment in Israel's history, the Exodus, where God rescued his people Israel from slavery in Egypt and made a covenant with them giving them

the Law which governed their relationship with him. The Exodus was the foundational story for who Israel was, and indeed for who their God was. So David prays, in verse 22,

22 ‘How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. And who is like your people Israel – the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? **24** You have established your people Israel as your very own for ever, and you, LORD, have become their God.¹

So this promise to David now becomes intertwined with Israel’s story as God’s people whom he rescued out of slavery and brought into his land.

But, this promise not only goes back to Exodus, but to God’ original promise to Abraham in Genesis. God promised Abraham the land, that his name would be great, that he would become a great nation, and that through his descendants all the peoples on earth would be blessed.² The blessing promised to Abraham would be the way in which God would undo the curse of sin unleashed by our first parents way back in the Garden. So now God promises David, verse 9,

Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. **10** And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed.

The promises given to Abraham and Moses of land, of a name, of a nation, of blessing, here will be realised through David and his house. For the people of Israel that means peace, rest from their enemies, a home of their own. In these blessings we see a picture of the blessing God means to bring to the world through David’s son here promised.

King

Having reaffirmed the promise to Israel, God now makes the promise about the king in verses 12-16. David will die, but God says,

I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. **13** He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. **14** I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. **15** But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. **16** Your house

¹ Cf. Exodus 19:4-6

² Genesis 12:1-3

and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.”

What will David’s descendant do? Build a temple for God. We immediately think of Solomon, David’s son, who famously builds the temple in Jerusalem. With the construction of the temple the key elements of Old Testament Jewish faith are in place - God’s people, in God’s land, with God’s law, under God’s king, worshipping at God’s temple.

But does Solomon really fit the bill for this promise? His kingdom does not last forever. Indeed, because he took many wives and turned away from God the kingdom was broken in two after he died, with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The northern kingdom was wiped out by the Assyrians in 722. Then Jerusalem itself was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 and its people taken into exile, the last king saw his sons executed before his eyes were put out. The Persian king Cyrus restored Jerusalem and returned its people, but there was no more king. But the Jewish prophets still held on to this promise to David, that one day one of his descendants will be king, and his throne will endure. That “for ever” became the wellspring of hope for the remnant of God’s people throughout their subjugation first the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans.

“He will be my son”

In Psalm 2 we see the language of 2 Samuel picked up.

I will proclaim the LORD’S decree:

He said to me, ‘You are my son;
today I have become your father.

8 Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.’

These words, scholars say, were used at the coronation of the kings of Israel and Judah. In the words of this Psalm that hope for a descendant of David, becomes a hope that God will rule all the nations of the earth through his king on Zion, the city of David, the king who would be his son. And every coronation the hope sprang in the people’s hearts, would this be the one? Would this be the son through whom God would rule the world? Would this be the one who would bring peace, not just for Israel but for all the nations, so that they would beat their swords into ploughshares? Would this be the one who bring rest, not just for Israel, not just for the nations, but for the creation itself, such that the wolf would lie down with the lamb, and they would neither harm nor destroy on all God’s holy mountain for the earth would be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea?³

³ Cf. Isaiah 2.2-5, 9.1-7, 11.1-9

Then one day, in Roman occupied Judea, a wild prophet stood in the shallows of the river Jordan, preaching for the people to return to God, and washing them in the river as a sign of their change of heart. And out of the crowd and into the river stepped a carpenter, Yeshua by name, son of Joseph so it was thought. He went down into the water with the prophet. And as he emerged from the depths the heavens broke open and a voice came from on high, "You are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased." Every time those words had been uttered had been through the mouth of a prophet or a priest, but now, now it was God himself saying, "You are my son."

Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus fulfilling the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, beginning with 2 Samuel 7, but not in the ways people expected. Let's take 2 key ones from 2 Samuel 7.

Temple

First, that David's son would build the temple. In John 2 we read Jesus say, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."⁴ In fact this is the only piece of evidence the false witnesses bring against Jesus in his trial.⁵ John says that the temple he was talking about was his body and that it was only after he had been raised that the disciples understood. Yes, Solomon did build the temple. But the true temple, that is the place where God lives on earth was Jesus' own body. What's more, since Jesus has ascended into heaven, he has poured out his Holy Spirit, the presence of God, on all who believe in his name, such that we become members of his body and the living temple of God. And so the apostle Peter can write, using the language of 2 Samuel, "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual *house* to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."⁶

I will punish him

Second, did you see that one dark note in the midst of such hope in the prophecy?

When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands.⁷

While the history of Israel and Judah's kings is one where various kings were punished for their wrongs, the details here seem very specific. And really this is one of things that has most stood out to me in preparing this sermon. Because we read in Matthew 27.

⁴ John 2.19

⁵ Matthew 26.61, Mark 14.58

⁶ 1 Peter 2.5

⁷ 2 Samuel 7.14

[Pilate] had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. **27** Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers round him. **28** They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, **29** and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. **30** They spat on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

Did you see it there? Jesus, the promised son of David, the Son of God, here is crowned king, flogged by human hands, punished with a rod wielded by men. But *he is innocent*. He has done no wrong. This is the nations of Psalm 2 raging against the LORD and his anointed. They take the sceptre of his rule and strike him with it, so that the punishment that should fall on them for their rebellion falls on him. The punishment for the wrong we have done falls on him. *The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.*⁸

This is the greatest story ever told, the story whose voice faintly echoes in all other stories, the story that meets the deepest longings of the human heart because it is true. This is the true quest, the promised king come, the greatest monster defeated, the kingdom rescued. But the story is not yet finished. Indeed we are still in it. Jesus is David's promised son. In the cross he is crowned king. In his resurrection he has defeated sin and death. He is reigning at the Father's right hand. His kingdom has begun, but we still pray your kingdom come. We confess that he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. We still long for the day when swords will be beaten to ploughshares. I can't help thinking of the war in Gaza and lamenting that both sides have missed the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. His kingdom transcends geographical boundaries. His people are no longer a single ethnic group, but people drawn from every tribe and language and nation. We still long for that day when the wolf will lie down with the lamb. We long for the peace and justice only the king will bring, and the home he will secure where we will no longer be disturbed. That is the shape of our hope. While we wait, we do so with faith, trusting in the king who has been punished in our place. And we act in love, living under his authority, following his example.

⁸ Isaiah 53.4