

“EXTREME MAKEOVER: TABERNACLE EDITION”

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Text: 2 Samuel 7:14a (NLT)

God’s Word: Hebrews 3:1-6 (NLT)

2 Samuel 7:1-14a NLT

When King David was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all the surrounding enemies,² the king summoned Nathan the prophet. “Look,” David said, “I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of God is out there in a tent!”³ Nathan replied to the king, “Go ahead and do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you.”

⁴But that same night the LORD said to Nathan,⁵ “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD has declared: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? ⁶I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. I have always moved from one place to another with a tent and a Tabernacle as my dwelling. ⁷Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained to Israel’s tribal leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, “Why haven’t you built me a beautiful cedar house?”’

⁸“Now go and say to my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I took you from tending sheep in the pasture and selected you to be the leader of my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before your eyes. Now I will make your name as famous as anyone who has ever lived on the earth! ¹⁰And I will provide a homeland for my people Israel, planting them in a secure place where they will never be disturbed. Evil nations won’t oppress them as they’ve done in the past, ¹¹starting from the time I appointed judges to rule my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

“Furthermore, the LORD declares that he will make a house for you—a dynasty of kings! ¹²For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. ¹³He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. ¹⁴I will be his father, and he will be my son.

Just one week into my seminary career, I found myself in the dining hall one night with a group of five or six other first-year students. Though I hardly knew them at the time, these people became some of my best friends through seminary. Since I really didn’t know them all that well at the time, it’s interesting that I remember this particular night, but the memory is still vivid, just as if it happened yesterday. I believe I remember it

because the conversation around the dinner table that night became the first great theological debate of my seminary career. The topic of debate: “Does God need humans?” Sitting at the table, we had people on both sides of the debate. Those who said, “No, God does not need humans,” were arguing God’s sovereignty and God’s ability to function and achieve God’s purposes in God’s creation without humans. This is certainly a valid argument, it seems to me if we suggest otherwise, we would be limiting God’s power and majesty. On the other side of the argument were those who said, “Yes, God does need humans.” Those arguing on this side, drew heavily from the creation story and suggested that God deeply desires to be in relationship with humanity and God has created humans to have dominion over this creation, and thus humanity is needed by God to fulfill that role. They further argued that God needs humans to help spread the Gospel message to other people in the world; again, very valid points.

Needless to say, this debate went on for quite some time. We even conscripted the opinion of some more “learned” seminary students, who were in their second year, and sitting at a table nearby. After listening to and participating in the debate for some time, I finally figured out that we really weren’t disagreeing on the matter all that much. So I started to think about what it was we were saying in answer to the question, “Does God need humans?” I decided that we were all in agreement that God does not need humans in order to be and remain God; however, God does need humans for companionship and to further God’s purposes on earth. So I jumped back into the debate with this conclusion, “God does not need humans like humans need water, we are not necessary to God’s survival. But God needs humans kind of like women need chocolate.” You know, sometimes, women just crave chocolate and they’re a lot happier when we have it; just like God is a lot happier to have us around, to be in relationship with us, and to have us serving God in God’s creation. This seemed to be an agreeable conclusion to all involved in the debate, and having finished up our dinners, we all went on our way, but I will admit to you that this is a question I continue to ponder from time-to-time, and it is one which is broached to an extent in our Scripture reading for today.

Having now moved the ark of God in Jerusalem, and feeling quite settled in his new home and reign, David decides that God needs such a home as well, a more permanent dwelling than the tent of meeting which had moved around with the Israelites since their exodus from Egypt. David calls in the prophet Nathan, and without even revealing his plan, David says only to Nathan, “I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” Nathan jumps in and tells David to proceed with all he has in mind, that he has the Lord’s blessings. David is thinking he will build a cedar dwelling for the ark of God that is as lavish as his own home. And cedar at this time was an extremely expensive commodity, accessible only to the rich. But God has something else in mind, and he lets Nathan know of it that very night. Essentially, God sends through Nathan a message that God has never had a house of cedar, never asked for one, and really does not need one. But the message does not stop there. God completely turns the tables and declares that he will establish from the offspring of David a great house, a kingdom that will last forever! What an amazing message from God in response to David’s desire to build for the Lord a temple!

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the show, "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." In this show, families in need of a new home are sent on a week's vacation while a team consisting of both local volunteers and ABC hosts and staff tear down the family's current home and build them a new one. Always, the family receiving this gift of a new home is in great need of a house because of many adopted children, or special health needs, or other things along those lines, and the inspiration and hope that surrounds the giving and receiving of these new homes is always remarkable. I'll just go ahead and admit to you that I've watched this show from time to time, and almost every time I watch it, I am brought to tears. The stories of families scraping through in the toughest of situations and now receiving a new home designed specifically to meet their needs are always gut-wrenching. Watching the team of volunteers who pour their time and energy into the building of the new home is always inspiring, and the looks of joy on the faces of the family when they hear the crowds chanting "Move that bus!" and they see their home for the first time—it's so awesome. Suddenly, they have a new outlook on life; suddenly, they can imagine a future with hope!

This is exactly what David is prepared to do for God. David wants to move the ark of God out of the "shabby" tent of meeting and into a more suitable, specially-designed temple. He's planning an "extreme makeover" of the Lord's house. David wants God to be established permanently as the God of the Israelites, and David is prepared to go to great lengths to make this happen. But David seems to have forgotten that God is the builder of all things. As the author of Hebrews says, "*For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.*" David had one house in mind, but God had quite another. David was thinking structure, God was talking kingdom. There is an important lesson for us in God's appearance to Nathan. First, God's response sends a clear signal to David and the Israelite nation that God's presence among God's people is not dependent upon a Temple.

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition is a prime example of the fact that we humans tend to get caught up in structures at times. This is true even of our churches, where we are known for spending great amounts of time and energy debating things like what color the carpet in the custodial closet should be, or whether we should have holly bushes or boxwoods landscaping the front of the building. Now, I exaggerate a bit, but the point remains. The issue is not about the building. God does not care whether the carpet is purple or red, God does not care whether the ark is housed in a tent or in a great cedar temple. God is about the task of Kingdom-building whether there is a temple or not, whether there is a church building or not, and God will be with us wherever we are. As heirs of this kingdom--first established in the root of Jesse, the heir of David, the Son of God--we are to be about the business of kingdom-building too. God does not need a Temple, but God does rely on the people of the kingdom. The building where we gather is only a secondary matter.

What is of primary importance is doing God's work in God's world. Part of God's plan to build through David's offspring a great kingdom, is a promise to bring a different

kind of justice to the world. You see worldly dynasties are unlike the kingdom of God; the justice of this world is far different from the justice of God's kingdom. By thwarting David's plan to build a Temple and promising to build for David an enduring kingdom instead, God is keeping us from slipping into a comfortable piety that fails to uphold God's justice in the kingdom. By promising for David a dynasty through his offspring, God is building a kingdom that is radically different from the world's kingdoms. As heirs to this kingdom of God, we are summoned to stand in the tension between faith commitment and worldly engagement, between God's interests and the world's interests. We feel safe and secure in this place, but lounging in the house of cedar does nothing to spread the message of God's love to a world that is full of hate and hurt.

When I was a little girl, one of my most favorite things to do was play hide and seek and pretend I was in my own little fort. It was not uncommon for me to run and hide when I heard my Dad come home from work and pull in the driveway. When I heard the door open and my dad walk around the corner, I would jump out in an effort to surprise him. Of course, my Dad always knew I was there, but he always acted surprised anyway, and he was always so excited to see me.

We have a message to share with the world, a message that can bring joy and excitement in the midst of suffering and pain. But we cannot share that message if we do not bust out from behind our hiding places--the walls that are around us, either here, or at work, or in our homes. God does not need a building, but there is building for us to do. The foundation blocks of this kingdom were laid when God sent his Son, Jesus Christ. There is a kingdom message to be shared, and the everlasting kingdom promised by God to David has already been inaugurated through the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who also was not confined by the walls of a Temple, nor even the walls of a tent. Jesus was out in the world; dining with the tax collectors, touching the lepers, drawing water with the prostitutes, teaching God's justice, and showing God's love everywhere he went. We are called to do the very same. The "Extreme Makeover: Tabernacle Edition," as David learned is not about sprucing up the building, it's about building up the kingdom, God's kingdom. As the hymn writers say, "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people!" Friends, we are the church! God is here among us whether the church buildings stand or not. With God at the helm, let us be about the task of justice-bearing, of love-spreading, and of kingdom-building! Let's help this world experience an extreme makeover, God edition!