

Sermon Given by

Simon Scott

At the Evening Services on 11th October 2009

2 Samuel 7 - "The house that God built"

One of the staples of TV entertainment in the 80s was an American soap called Dynasty, which focussed on the Carrington family's empire in Denver, Colorado. I suppose we have to conclude that the Carrington Dynasty was not secure, from the fact that Dynasty is now relegated to the status of Freeview repeats, probably in the early hours, when no one is watching!

Away from the world of fiction, modern day politicians probably have to admit if they are honest that their dynasty is not secure. A prime minister or president may be all smiles when the last votes are counted and he's won – he's at the top of the tree. But it doesn't take much to realise that to be at the top of the tree is to be at the top of a very greasy pole. A politician's dynasty is not secure...

So how about David, the great king we've been looking at in recent weeks. How secure is his dynasty? After all, his predecessor Saul had quickly sealed his own destiny once he was king: his dynasty wasn't secure. So what about David's? It's clear that in chapter 7 verse 1 his authority is well established – *'the king was settled in his palace'* and the reason is simple - he has very powerful friends: *'The Lord had given him rest on every side'*.

But the chapter before has at least raised questions. We've read that Michal, his favoured wife, had no children – so how is the family line going to be extended? And we've had that electrifying picture of judgment on Uzzah, when he tried to steady the ark. Is the ark really going to secure the future of a shrine in Jerusalem – or will it be a permanent health risk?

So is that snapshot of peace and authority in verse 1 simply that: a snapshot, filed away in some photo album as a memory of when things were good - a golden age Israel could never hope to recapture? Or is it secure? And where do we fit in as we read this account? Is the Christian's confidence on a steady footing or not?

I want us to look at the episode in three chapters please.

1. David's plan over-turned

I suppose you could say that David's confidence takes a bit of a dent at the start of the chapter... Because God's plans for the future were different from his own. In verse 2 we read: ² *he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."*

It's clear that he wasn't satisfied with that state of affairs. Ok, when the people had been on the move, a Portacabin sanctuary made sense. But now that they were settled, a goatskin marquee wasn't good enough for God, or so David reasoned, in his luxury palace.

I think we have to applaud the basically spiritual ambitions that David had. Here was a man with the world at his feet and he wants to build not missile silos and fortresses, not even things which would establish his name as a public benefactor – educational institutes or parklands – but **a temple**. If one of us had his power and could make one wish which was guaranteed to be fulfilled, what would we ask for, I wonder? It was to David's credit that he set his heart on a temple.

Certainly Nathan didn't mind giving the plan clergy approval, because he rubber-stamped it in verse 3 ³ *Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."*

There is an interesting comment in the Church of England's official doctrinal statement, The 39 Articles, that Councils and Synods of the church can make mistakes and historically have sometimes done so.

That's important to remember today, when a consensus emerging between Christians is often considered to be evidence of the Spirit's leading. But even when it is two spiritual giants like David and Nathan making the plans, that isn't necessarily so, however much they talk, as Nathan did, about God being with David.

This is something of a theme for the writer of this history – so I'm sure we are supposed to take note: that good and godly people can make wrong spiritual judgments.

So Eli eyeing the strange acting woman at the tabernacle is a case in point – 'she's drunk', he thought – but he was wrong. Or Samuel looking at Jesse's sons eyes up the eldest, Eliab, and he's thinking - 'he must be the one I'm supposed to anoint king' – but he was wrong... God's servants often mean well, but they lack the wisdom of God. The kingdom of God is never safe in human hands, however godly those hands may be.

Certainly in this instance, God denied David the planning permission to build. Look at verse 5 ⁵ *"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?'"*

God goes on to ask gently had it been David's idea or God's – a question which considering a goatskin marquee had been fine up till now basically answers itself. But it is not an outright refusal: it is 'Not yet' rather than 'No'.

So let's move on to the next chapter of the tale:

2. David's plan surpassed:

God's message through the prophet Nathan is meant to inspire David's confidence by looking first at the past. And let's look for that at verses 8-9 ⁸ *"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following*

the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth.'

A look at David's past showed that God had got him to the top. He had been someone from a very humble background, **following a flock of sheep**. He now enjoyed the glorious responsibility of **leading the flock of God's people**.

He hadn't made that transition by clawing and elbowing his way through the opposition, but by patiently awaiting God's moment through endless twists and turns. A court musician one moment; a fugitive the next.

God had given him good looks that turned a few heads and charmed the women. God had given him good skills with the sling that upended a giant; God had given him a good character that won the affection and loyalty of his followers. But for years God didn't give him the public acknowledgement as king that he'd been promised.

Until now... So when he finally does make it to the throne, only one conclusion fits: it is God who has put him there. And therefore God is clearly committed to blessing David's future. Look down to verse 11, the new paragraph for where this is spelled out most clearly: "*The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.*

'You want to build a house for me,' says God, 'Well let me tell you something: I'm going to build a house for you. And the fulfilment of the promise will be much bigger than just your son Solomon, who will build a temple. In verse 16 ¹⁶ *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'* " Your dynasty is secure, says God: it'll last forever. The tide of time shall never this covenant remove.

What precious guarantees of the future they were – because even in David's lifetime it must have looked as if his dynasty was shaky. Following this, there were sex scandals, family feuds and palace coups.

And that was just the storm clouds gathering. Within a hundred years the nation was split in a bitter civil war and in time Jerusalem would be invaded. So much it seems for God's promise. Had it actually failed in the end?

We know from our vantage point it hadn't. When God says 'forever' he means it – and a thousand years after David another unlikely ruler came – a baby born in Bethlehem, the city of David, from the tribe and family of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's messenger, Nathan, was predicting that to David: 'You're not just top of the political tree now, you are at the top of a family tree from which will come the king of kings and the Lord of Lords.

3. God's plan embraced

The prayer of David in verses 18-29 tells us the correct response to God's plans. I don't intend to look at it in full now – but why not look at it again tonight and search out ways of echoing that prayer to God from your own standpoint.

The response from David was one of **humble confidence**. There was **humility** – not even a mention of the fact that God had overturned his plans – as he saw the broad sweep of God's plan, he was willing to admit that he was a small cog in the machinery. ¹⁸ *Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"*

8 times in his prayer this glorious majestic king humbles himself and calls himself simply 'your servant'. How do we compare? Is that humility a characteristic of ours – or do we instead want to boost our status, to build our empires and to bully our rivals into submission. If so we need to wake up to a sense of our own smallness.

But remember the **confidence** too. Because that promise inspired David with tremendous confidence – and it should have the same effect on us as well. Look at verse 27-9: ²⁷ *"O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer. ²⁸ O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. ²⁹ Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."*

When David prays 'God bless this house', it's not like some twee picture to hang wishfully on the wall – he was asking for what God had promised. If God hadn't promised a secure dynasty to David, that would have been too great a thing for David to beg. But with God's promise, David is confident. 'I desire nothing more', he says, 'And I expect nothing less.'

Similarly when God offers us as individuals a place in his eternal kingdom, we ought to be able to speak the same sort of way: I desire nothing more – because this is amazing. But with Jesus on the throne, I expect nothing less: I'm humbly confident, even in the darkest of times, because Christ's kingdom and dynasty is secure. If I may I'd like to apply it to our life as a church as well. Because that humble confidence in God to work for his plans sets me free to have the right kind of ambition and to lift our eyes from the petty goals we so often have.

I like the story of three medieval stone masons who were all working on a medieval building site and were asked by someone what they were doing: 'What does it look like?' asked the first. 'I'm breaking a rock'; 'I'm earning a living' said a second person. 'Getting money to feed my wife and baby'. But the third one had a loftier vision. 'What am I doing?' he said. 'I'll tell you what I'm doing: I'm building a cathedral.' Well, we are not building a temple for God – he has overturned that plan decisively now – because Jesus Christ is the meeting place between men and women and their God. We are not building a temple for him. But he is building the house of David to this day. It is a loftier construction than any cathedral and God invites us to be involved in that work. Don't let's be daunted by the scale of the work and the fact that we face a deficit. It is not a human endeavour; it is God's work – and our communion this evening reminds us how much it matters to him.

Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)