

Over the past several weeks we have been reading stories from the early history of Israel when they were ruled by their first kings. We have heard about Saul their first king and now David their second king.

We have heard stories of David being anointed king over a united Israel for what will be 40 years. Last week, we read the story of the ark of God being transported to Jerusalem as a confirmation of God's presence.

Continuing the story in the Old Testament book of 2nd Samuel we find that David builds a nice palace for himself made from cedar. David is consolidating his power in Jerusalem now with a nice palace and with the ark of God in the rapidly growing city.

In today's text, David is going to decide that God needs a nice house as well. David decides to build a temple for God.

As we read this story from 2 Samuel 7, we are challenged to ask ourselves this question. "How do we know if what we are doing is blessed and led by God or are we making a decision and then asking God to bless what we already want to do after the fact?" That is a difficult question to answer and one that this story draws us into.

Read 2 Samuel 7:1-13

A friend of mine told me a story one time about her childhood church. The church pastor announced that the church needed to build a new building. A very expensive new building to their campus.

The pastor announced that they would only build the building if the congregation could raise all of the money to build the building. They were not going to borrow any money. The pastor said that if God wanted them to build the building then they would raise all of the money themselves.

The pastor said going to a bank for a loan was a lack of faithfulness.

So the church set out to raise the large sum of money to build the new building. The church leaders tried everything they could but they came up short in raising the money to pay for the new building.

So what did the pastor and the Session of that church do? Did they announce that they did not raise enough money so they would not build the building? Nope, the pastor and Session decided to borrow from themselves.

They “borrowed” money from another church fund and promised that they would reimburse the fund where they borrowed the money from. The leadership announced that they were able to build the building without taking out a loan from a bank. The leadership announced that God provided this way for them to build the building without “borrowing” any money.

So did God bless the building of this new building? Or did the church leadership decide to build the building they wanted and then told God to bless their desire after the fact?

We have lots of examples of churches and church leaders making big spending decisions that may be questionable but then they reassure church members that this is what God wants. We have examples of televangelists saying that God wants them to raise over 50 million for a private jet or pastors telling people that it is God’s will that they have a big home and lots of expensive cars.

It’s easy to point to the examples of church people asking God to bless their extravagant lifestyles. But what about the decisions that we face all of the time?

How do we know if God wants us to take a certain job or make a certain expenditure? Or is the new job or expenditure our will that we are asking God to bless after the fact?

How do we know if God wants us to seek out a certain relationship? Or are we asking God to bless a relationship we have entered into after the fact?

How do we know where God wants this congregation to worship or are we asking God to bless a decision that we make after the fact? These are tough questions and ones that all of us are faced with if we take our faith in Jesus Christ seriously.

In the story that we read today, David decides that he is living in a nice house and that God needs a nice house as well. David says the ark of God needs to reside in a permanent home.

David tells Nathan about his plan to build a temple for God. Nathan, who we will discover becomes the conscience of David, tells David to go ahead with his plan. Nathan tells David to go ahead and build a nice temple for God.

But that same night a voice says to Nathan, “Go and tell my servant David that God has not ever lived in a house and it is not time to begin now.” The voice goes on to say that God has never complained about not having a house before.

So what is David to do? He was originally told by Nathan to go ahead with his plans to build a temple to God. But now Nathan is telling David that God does not want a temple? Which answer is David to believe?

To answer that question, David needs to ask himself why he is wanting to build this house or temple? Is David wanting to do this for God or is David doing this for his own personal gain? Is David wanting a temple to show the power of his kingdom?

If David is honest with himself and if we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that none of us act with pure motives. All of our actions are tainted by sin. All of our actions to some degree are done to benefit ourselves in some way. It's part of our sinful nature.

But what do we learn from this story that can help us when we are facing dilemmas about whether or not our actions are God's will or our will? One thing that we learn is that God does not need anything from us.

God did not need a house then and God does not need a house now. God cannot be controlled by our actions and God cannot be contained in our buildings that we build. God is outside of our control. So, therefore, God is alive and active both inside and outside of these church walls wherever we may choose to worship.

Something else that we see from this story is a reminder that God is the Creator and we are the creature. After David determines that God needs a house, God responds and calls David "his servant."

God reminds David who is in charge. And it is not David. God is the Creator and God is in charge. God cannot be manipulated by us nor controlled by us.

So when we are facing big decisions, how do we know if what we are seeking to do is being guided by God or if we are asking God to bless our wants after the fact of our decision?

We, too, like David must listen to all voices and not just to the ones that confirm what we think we want to do. The first voice that David heard told him to build the temple. If David would have listened only to this one voice that initially confirmed what he wanted to do, then he would have started the building project against God's will.

But the first voice was not the only voice. There was a follow up voice that told Nathan to tell David to hold on and to be patient. So we learn to listen to the voices which may disagree with what we initially want to do.

We listen to all voices and not just to the ones to confirm what we want to hear. Listening to only one voice or opinion is called group-think and that is not a good way to move forward in decision making.

The other important insight which comes from this story to help us in our decision making is patience. The temple will eventually be built. Just not by David. Solomon, the next king of Israel, will be the one to oversee the building of the temple.

So when we are facing decisions, we do not make them hastily. We also must be open to the answer that says, today is not the day and you may not yet be the person. We trust that God has a bigger picture and that we may be playing a small part in a much bigger picture.

It really sucks to be told that we have to wait. But we learn from this story from David's life that this may be the answer that God is giving to us. God says to David to trust my time and God may be saying to us to trust in God's time as well.

This story that we just read comes from a period about a thousand years before the life of Christ. In the gospel of John, Jesus describes himself as the one true temple of God.

The real temple that houses the presence of God will not be revealed for a thousand years after the time of David.

As we face our important decisions, we listen to all voices and we wait patiently.

We also affirm that the foundation for our answer rests in a relationship with Jesus Christ. AMEN.

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