

“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. 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. 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. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. “ ‘The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: 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. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’ ” (2 Samuel 7:8-16)

What Made King David Great?

What made George Washington great? He was a great man, right? But why? He was not a great speaker. He hated giving speeches and someone has called him “the least quotable of the founding fathers.” He was not a brilliant intellect. He didn’t participate in the debates at the constitutional convention or put forth any deep insights on the new republic. He relied heavily on Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to recommend policies to build the new nation. He was not a brilliant general. He lost far more battles than he won. But in spite of all that, he was a great leader. He held the army and later the country together when a lesser man would’ve let it fall apart. He fervently believed in America and people believed in him and they followed him. Perhaps his greatest action was his refusal to become a king or a dictator.

There are different kinds of greatness: great generals, great writers, great athletes and musicians and friends. Today, God directs our attention to another great man in history: King David. He was a great warrior and general. He was a great musician and poet; he wrote beautiful psalms, like Psalm 23. But when all those things were already true for him, God promised to make his name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. What was God talking about? **What made King David great?**

I.

God’s answer in 2 Samuel may surprise us. God doesn’t talk about any of the things that David did or was good at. He talks about his son. God told David, **“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.”** Who was this “offspring”? In one sense, it was King Solomon, David’s son and successor. You have to understand what was happening. After years of upheaval and civil war, David was king over all of Israel. He had conquered Jerusalem and built a palace for himself. He turned his attention to the Lord. For five hundred years, the children of Israel had been worshipping at the tabernacle – the tent that Moses had constructed at Mt. Sinai. King David wanted to build something more permanent and more elaborate, a house or a temple for the Lord. So he called in Nathan the prophet and told him what he wanted to do. Nathan told him to go ahead, because the LORD was with David.

But Nathan did not check with God first. That night, God gave Nathan a message to take back to David. The king was not the one to build God’s house. His son would do that. In the process, God would build a house for David. Obviously, there’s a play on words here. David’s house was not a building; it was his dynasty. That dynasty would rule until the destruction of Jerusalem more than 400 years later. Then it would last for almost 600 years more, even though they would no longer be kings.

God gave David a prophecy that had a double fulfillment. On the one hand, King Solomon would come and build the temple. That’s the first fulfillment. But then, we have a second and greater fulfillment. For hundreds of years after this, the prophets pointed to the King who was coming from the line of David and the people waited and hoped until, the angel Gabriel went to Mary, a virgin from the house of David who was promised to Joseph, also of the house and line of David. Gabriel told her that the Holy Spirit would come on

her and cause her to conceive. And he said, **“The Lord God will give him [to the child she would bear] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”**

God used King David to be the human ancestor of Christ. That shows the depths of God’s concern for us. God knew us when he raised up David and made him king. David had seven older brothers. In that time and place, the youngest would’ve been last and least important in everything. While his older brothers were serving in the army, David was home taking care of his father’s sheep. But God chose David and made him king to show his generation and ours that none of this was an accident. God had a plan and nothing could keep that plan from reaching its fulfillment.

That plan began before the world began. God knew that sin would infect and ruin his creation. He knew that once Adam and Eve defied him, every human being would be born a sinner doomed to hell. So God decided before he first began to create that he would send his Son into this world to save us. God chose Israel to be the nation that he would use to give human flesh to the Son of God. God chose David and his line and finally, Mary and Joseph. And God controlled all of history so that when the time had fully come, that baby would be born. Egypt rose and fell so that Abraham’s family could grow into a nation there and so that God could lead them out of slavery to the Promised Land. Empires came and went: Assyria and Babylon, Greece and Rome, all so that God’s plan would find its fulfillment in the exact time and place that God had chosen.

God did all that for us. God chose us from eternity to be his own. God managed all of history so that Jesus would be born and live and die and rise again and win eternal life for us. God continued to guide and direct the affairs of men so that his message went out from Jerusalem to the very ends of the earth. It found us and God gave us faith. All that is the continuation of the plan that God announced to King David. It shows the unique kind of greatness God gave to David, a greatness that has nothing to do with what that man accomplished. A greatness that has everything to do with what God did through him. My friends, **what made King David great? Being the ancestor of Christ.**

II.

The beauty of being a New Testament Christian is that we can see what God was doing through all those ages of Old Testament history and promise. Those promises were not just for King David, but for you and me. God spoke to him to show us our Savior. He told David what God himself was going to accomplish through the life and family of David. He said, **“And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own ...”** God promised to give his people their own home. Then he said, **“Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel.”** So not just a homeland, but a refuge was coming. God promised Israel safety from their enemies. And finally, God said, **“I will also give you rest from all your enemies.”** That promise was for David himself. He had spent years fighting Israel’s wars and running from her previous king. God promised him rest.

But you know what? These promises don’t really fit the time of David. If God had said these things to Moses when the people were traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land, that would’ve made sense. But by the time David lived, they had already had a home for centuries. And at least for the moment, God had delivered them from all their enemies. For as long as David lived, the people were safe. David was the most powerful king and defender Israel ever had. And at this time, at least, he himself was safe from his enemies.

But all those blessings were temporary. Israel would eventually be conquered and scattered throughout the world. Even today, the nation of Israel has only a limited correspondence with the ancient kingdom. And the Jewish nation endured centuries of oppression by wicked men – by the unbelievers who surrounded them. Later, they were even oppressed by Christians. David’s true rest never really came in this life. He was never totally free from war and at least two of sons revolted against him, one causing him to flee for a time. Only in heaven did David find real rest.

Did God’s promises fail? No. They all came true in the sense that God meant them. These promises are for the true Israel, the believers. The true people of God are all those who trust in Christ as their Savior. These promises are what Jesus came to give us. You see, like David, we are all born as sinners in a sinful world. We’re born into a world that’s at war with God. We’re born on the wrong side. Because of the sin that we inherit from Adam, we all belong to the devil from the moment we’re conceived. We can never change that situation. The truth is, no unbeliever wants to change that situation.

Even though today, we are believers, we still see the evidence that we were born sinners in all the wrong we do. My friends, we've entered one of the most stressful times of the year. How many times have you already lost your temper as you try to get everything done that you don't have time to do? How many times have you already made your spouse or your children or your parents pay because you're frustrated with how much money you feel you have to spend this time of year? How many times have you wallowed in self-pity as if you were the only person who was under stress during the holidays? How much foul or unkind or selfish language has escaped from your lips? All those words and actions, all those feelings and thoughts are sin. They are selfish and ungrateful and lacking in trust. The fact that those thoughts and feelings, those words and deeds would come from us shows that we are still sinners. They show that we deserve nothing but God's punishment in hell forever.

David deserved that punishment, too. But God took him from the pasture and made him a king so that a thousand years later, Jesus could be born in Bethlehem and die in Jerusalem and pay for David's sin and for all the sin of all the world. When Jesus rose, he kept the promise God made to David. He gave his people a homeland. Not the geographical land of Israel, but heaven. That's our home. That's the place Christ won for us. Because he died and rose, all that sin in our hearts is paid for and gone. All the sin that bleeds over into sinful words and actions and thoughts and feelings is wiped away forever. There is nothing left to send us to hell or to keep us out of heaven. Because of Jesus, God has given you that new home.

And when the time comes for you and me to go there, we will at last have peace. Week after week, I see you. I visit you in your homes and in the hospital. I sit down with you in my office or talk with you on the phone. Over and over again, someone is suffering something. Sometimes it's only one or two of you. Sometimes it's more. Some guilt is torturing you. Some person is making your life difficult. Some pain or loss is especially sharp this time of year, but it will still be there when the holidays are over. Some sadness shadows your life. All those things come from sin. But in the home God has given us, we will be safe from all that. Jesus will wipe every tear from our eyes and he will protect us from all harm and danger forever. We will have rest, just as David does today.

That is an amazing promise. And God shows that it will come true when he shows that he kept the first part of the promise he made to David. Jesus really came, just like God said he would. 600 years after David's line lost the throne, when the descendant of kings was reduced to working as a poor carpenter, Jesus came. The greatest king of all was born in a stable and died on a cross and rose from the dead. So the rest of promise will come true, too. We will have eternal life. That makes David great, not because he gave us the promise or because he kept the promise, but because God in his grace chose him to be the agent – the means – by which he kept the promise. **What made King David great? Being the agent of our peace.**

That greatness is different from any greatness this world could ever recognize or even think of. In spite of all his accomplishments, David was still a sinner who ruled a tiny kingdom in a sinful world. All that he won and did was destined to decay and collapse. That's true about everything we do, too. But God gave David a precious gift: he made him a crucial link in his plan to bring our Savior to us. That makes him great – a great piece of the plan to save the world. During this Advent season, stop and reflect on how much God did to make that plan come true. And rejoice because he will do every bit as much to finish that plan and bring you home. Amen.