

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 12.21.14 Advent 4b

Day One: 2 Sam. 7:1-11, 16

¹Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, ²the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." ³And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, ⁵"Go and tell my servant David, "Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling.

It was David's idea to build a grand house for God, a Temple. And that's a good thing. But it was not God's idea.

David was distressed because the Ark of the Covenant was kept in a tent. And that's a good thing. It was good for him to be concerned about glorifying God. But it

was not God's first concern. God desired a different kind of house and a different kind of glory.

Instead, of buildings which eventually fall down, it was God's desire to build a "house" of people. Naturally, those people would need buildings in which to worship, but first and most important was the spiritual building of the church.

God desired to build a "house" (that is, a kingdom) for David. And more than an earthly kingdom, God planned to make David's descendants into an eternal heavenly kingdom. Our *real* house would be Jesus, the one who would reign in David's place. And our home in Jesus will last forever.

What is your dream home? You spend time fixing and decorating your house. But how is your house a dwelling place for Jesus? A place where you worship as a family and come close to him?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, you said that you would prepare a place, a home, for me in heaven. Help me to look forward to that home, not just to the earthly buildings I have inhabited here. Amen.*

Day Two: Romans 16:25-27

²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

How do you end your letters? I often say something like, “Well, I gotta get going now...” or “looking forward to hearing from you.”

Look at how Paul concludes his letter to the believers in Rome. He praises God. And at the same time he encourages the people reading his letter by reminding them of what God has done for them, and what he is able to do for them.

Often our letters and emails are filled with complaints. “I’m so busy!” Or with gossip about others, “did you hear?” How much of what we write is likely to build up the person we are writing to –

or to remind them of good things?

The people who received Paul’s letter did not even know him. He had not visited there yet. But he knew that they faced many challenges, so he assured them that God was able to strengthen them and to build up their faith.

How many emails will you send today? To whom will you send them? Even if they are business emails, you are likely to write to someone that you already know could use some encouragement.

Why not see if you can add just one sentence to an email or a letter that praises God for his gifts, or which gives spiritual encouragement to those you love. How would you put it into your own words?

How can I help? How can I pray for you and your family? God has always been faithful in the past, and I am confident that he will see you through these days too. God has given you great gifts.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I speak or write to so many people. Let my words be more than empty sounds. Let them share the blessings which you have shared with me. Amen.*

Day Three: Luke 1:26-38

²⁶*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*

³¹*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*

We don't think very much about the meaning of our names. Every now and then someone will look theirs up, but normally we only think about who else might have shared the same name.

When I was a kid, absolutely nobody knew (or cared) that Donald meant "ruler of the world." We don't think of that meaning because it comes from Gaelic, and who speaks Gaelic around here? They only associated my name with Donny Osmond, or Don Juan, or (worst of all) Donald Duck.

But when the angel announced the name of her baby, Mary would have immediately known the meaning of the name Y'shua. "God saves" would be her son. The meaning of Jesus' name was more obvious to people at his time because it was in their language. (Jesus is the Latin version. Joshua is another way to say this name in English.)

Mary would have called out to "God saves" to bring him in for lunch. His friends would have asked if "God saves" could come out to play. His relatives would remark about how "God saves" had grown this year.

How does it change your prayer to speak to "God saves?" Instead of just praying "in Jesus' name," how does it encourage you to make your requests to God the Father in the name of "God saves?"

Jesus very name is gospel. It is good news for us.

Prayer: *Dear Savior of the world, savior of my life, savior of those lost and helpless, rescuer of those falling and failing, I can call upon you with joy and confidence because I know who you are. Savior! Amen.*

Day Four: 2 Sam. 7:1-11, 16

The king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent."³ And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

David was convinced that he should build a temple to honor God, and so was the prophet Nathan. He told David to go ahead and do it. Only later, when Nathan returned home, did God speak to him and correct him.

It is not always God-pleasing for us to build a great house of worship, even if our intentions are good.

The right reasons to build a church are not always those we think of. David was ashamed that he had built a nicer house for himself than they had provided for the tabernacle. But God wasn't concerned about David's palace. God was concerned about his people, and the right time and the right way for them to build his temple. David was a man of war. God gave the task of building the temple to his son, Solomon.

It is my belief that the time has come for St. Paul

congregation to build a new house of worship. That's my conclusion after praying about this now for several years. I was not always of this opinion. Even now, like Nathan, I am open to God's correction. That's why we approach such decisions seeking the wisdom of more people, and taking steps one at a time.

But I believe this is the time, not just because of parking, or maintenance, or money. I am convinced that this would be the best way for our church to be healthy and vibrant for the future.

You may believe that our church should remain in the center of the city. I hope it is not just because that's what you're used to or what you prefer. But you may believe that God has given you a call to speak the gospel to people in the city. If so, you will commit yourself and your money, like David did to obeying God's call.

Either way, we must discern God's call and follow it. And we must do that together.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you led David. Now lead us, not for our glory but for yours. Amen.*